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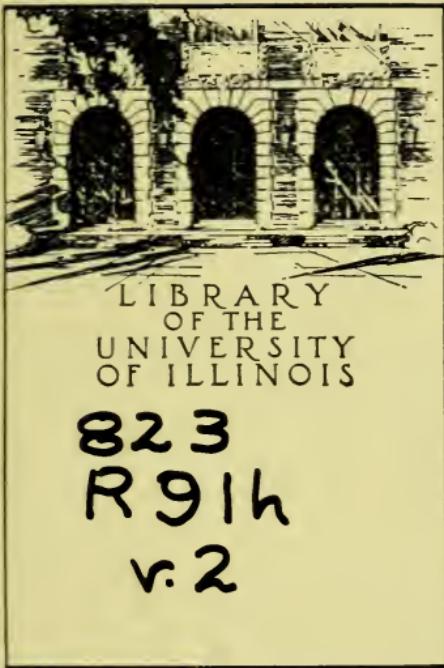
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HEART OF OAK

VOL. II.

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HEART OF OAK

A THREE-STRANDED YARN

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF

'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR' 'THE PHANTOM DEATH'
'THE CONVICT SHIP' ETC.

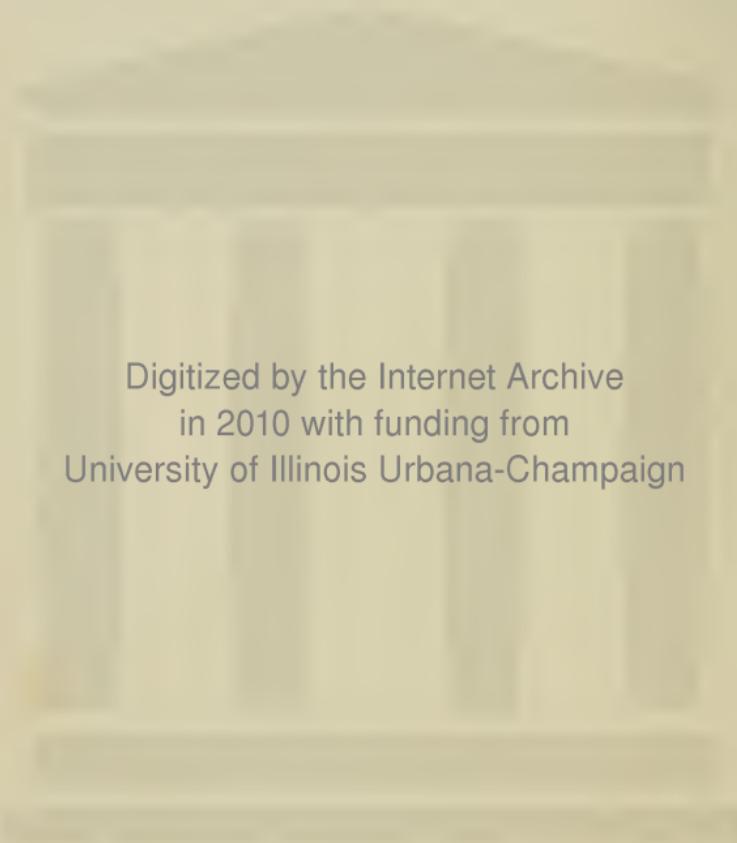


IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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HEART OF OAK

CHAPTER XI

THE CREW LEAVE

THE sail shone like a peak of ice against a belly of soft snow-cloud right ahead—that is, ahead as the hull's bows lay. I should have supposed it ice, but for the captain, who stood close beside the companion holding the ship's glass: he said, ‘There she is, miss.’

‘Is she coming this way?’ cried I, shivering with cold and passion.

‘I can’t tell as yet. She’s only just been sighted. Bear a hand with the first empty tar barrel you can get hold of,’ he bawled, moving forwards, and he continued to shout,

but I could not gather the instructions he delivered.

Presently Mrs. Burke joined me, and then Mr. Owen swathed to the nostrils.

‘It’s almost too good to credit,’ he exclaimed. ‘Can they be mistaken? Is it ice? If it should prove a ship!’

He went sliding and staggering towards some men in the waist, and stood questioning them, heedless of the captain.

With the promptitude of seamen the crew collected a lot of stuff for making a smoke; they stacked a large heap of material near the gangway and set fire to it, and in about ten minutes a thick body of blue smoke was rolling over the rail, and clouding upwards with many a sparkling ruddy gleam shooting up tongue-shaped or arrow-like into the throat of the sooty pouring.

It was wide daylight and the antarctic day young, but the clouds rimmed the horizon with the shadow of night, and the crimson

light of the flare promised as swift an intelligence of our forlorn condition as the smoke. The seamen continued to feed the fire ; and all the while Captain Burke was stretching his telescope at the distant gleam ; the men again and again turning their eyes from it to him with looks growing dark with impatience and consuming anxiety. Mr. Owen had fetched his binocular glass and strained his eyes through them without intermission. Mrs. Burke and I standing in the companion, which was the one sheltered part of that long stretch of frozen deck and smashed bulwarks, gazed without speech.

Suddenly a sailor, one who had been most active in feeding the fire, sprang on to the rail : he grasped a spear-shaped projection of ice, which broke short off and he fell on his back ; he sprang again with an oath, and after looking, turned to others who were standing near the fire and roared :

‘Mates, she’s leaving us, by God !’

‘She takes us for a whaler trying out. There’s no good in smoke as a signal down here,’ said a sailor.

‘It’s our chance,’ bawled the fellow who had sprung and fallen, now throwing himself back on to the deck. ‘There mayn’t come another for weeks. What’s to happen then? Are we to drive about in this fired ocean till we ends as froze-up corpses? I’m for following her.’

‘Take her bearings, bo’sun, while she’s in sight,’ shouted a seaman, and the huge sailor, as obedient as though the captain had given the command, rolled aft and put the sharp of his hand upon the compass bowl.

‘Captain Burke,’ exclaimed one of the seamen, in a voice startling with its sudden savage note of revolt, ‘we’ve had enough of this. There’s nothen that’s a-going to be of any use to us in them booms.’ He pointed behind him with his thumb. ‘There’s our

chance. We'll run ourselves into her sight and she'll pick us up.'

'Hold your jaw, you Johnson!' said Captain Burke, who was as white as the deck in the face, though his eyes showed dangerously, like a madman's who watches his chance to leap upon you.

'Hold *my* jaw?' growled the seaman, a hairy scowling man in a yellow sou'-wester, dropping his head into an insolent butting posture. 'Why, so I will arter I've told yer that when them masts went we was quit of your blistered articles, and here's one as ain't for stopping one bloomin' minute longer to mess and muck about with jury-masts, pen-norths of parasol to be blowed over the bows as soon as they're up. Mates,' he yelled, 'I'm after that ship whilst there's time. Who's for coming?'

As though there had been something quickening and thrilling as magnetism in the sailor's shout, the whole of the men made a

jump for the boat, one of the first being the boatswain who was coming aft from the compass when the seaman bawled the invitation:

The smoke of the flare had fluttered down into a curl of pale blue vapour, which blew over the rail feather-shaped to the sea. The captain stood this side of it, watching the men in a staring idle way whilst they went to work at the boat with gleaming knives, hacking and cutting at her fastenings—he seemed as though deprived of his reason—then he roared out :

‘Leave that boat alone. Don’t touch that boat. She belongs to the ship. She’s my property. Overboard and swim for that vessel there if she’s your chance, you dogs! But leave that boat alone.’

A few turned their heads to look at him and then went on passing their knives through the lashings, clearing away the booms and so forth.

‘Stop him !’ shrieked Mrs. Burke. ‘Help,

Mr. Owen ! What can he do ? What's the use of it ? They'll kill him ! ' and I too screamed when I saw the captain rush upon the nearest of the men regardless of their naked knives ; he struck out right and left, flooring two, but a third—none of them I observed offering to hit him back—crooked his leg at the poor man's heels, and he fell, fetching the iron-hard snow-coated plank a thump that left him motionless.

Mrs. Burke rushed to his side. The boatswain cried out :

‘ He's no right to stop us, mum. It's our lives we're working for and thinking of. You and him and the lady'll come along too. Now, mates, whilst there's daylight, for God's sake ! ’

Mr. Owen crossed to the captain's side and assisted Mrs. Burke to drag him aft. His figure slipped over the frozen snow as though he was lifeless, but they had not dragged him a dozen paces in the direction of the companion-hatch when he cried out and struggled. Mr.

Owen let go ; with the help of his wife he got on his feet.

‘ Get me some brandy,’ said he.

I heard him and made with what speed I might for the cabin, my face bloodless and my heart beating as fast as a watch ticks. That brief scene of conflict, like to one of those terrible mutinies I had read of in sea tales, had been shocking to witness, on top as it was of our helpless and awful situation, and all the anguish of expectation and fear which had filled the past few days. I was sick and nearly fainted. I sat down to catch my breath and press my temples. Before I found strength to rise, Mrs. Burke descended, followed by her husband.

He seated himself at the table, upon which he lay his right arm and buried his face in it. She coaxed him after a little into taking some brandy, and then observing my state she got me to take a sip.

Meanwhile overhead I heard the crew busy

with the long-boat ; her keel thundered as they ran her to the side for launching. Their movements were full of feverish bustle ; in truth they were working for life or death ; they meant to catch the ship and there remained but a very few hours of daylight.

‘ Does your head pain you, Edward ? ’

‘ No,’ he answered, and strained his hearing to catch what was passing above.

‘ Will they let us know when they’re ready to take us ? ’ I cried.

‘ Take us ! ’ the captain exclaimed, with a sudden anger in his whole manner as he turned towards me. ‘ They may take you, but I stop here.’

‘ No, no, Miss Marie,’ cried my poor old nurse, ‘ they must not take you without me, and my place is by my husband’s side wher-ever he is. Think if they should miss the ship, which is more than likely : they’ll be in an open boat in this frozen ocean ! Fancy being in an open boat in such weather as that

of the night before last ! You would not live to see to-morrow's dawn. And how should their going concern us ? If they fall in with the ship they'll report we are here and the vessel may return. If they miss her they are in an exposed open boat, and we are in a dry, comfortable hull, with a good warm cabin to sit in, and no worse off than if all the crew were aboard. For what can they do ? If the ship comes, she'll come whether the crew are on board or not.'

' But are the three of us to be left alone ? ' I exclaimed.

' The dogs could have helped me,' muttered the captain. ' We blew northwards yesterday and to-day we sighted a sail. They are villains to steal my boat, the only remaining boat. But I am too few for them—I am too few for them.' He clasped his hands upon the back of his head as though he was in pain there.

Just then four or five seamen came tum-

bling down the companion-ladder : one held a lighted lantern. This man exclaimed :

‘Capt’n, the boat’s alongside, and all’s ready.’

‘What are you doing down here?’ thundered the captain.

‘The victuals we want are in the lazarette,’ answered the man. ‘No good lifting the main-hatch and overhauling the cargo when all we need’s handy here.’

Even whilst he spoke the rest had pulled up a little square hatch cover with an iron ring in it ; it fitted a large manhole a few paces abaft the companion-ladder ; this hatch conducted to a part of the after-hold called the lazarette, a sort of store-room in which the cabin provisions and wines with other commodities were stowed.

Captain Burke jumped from his seat ; his wife fell upon him shrieking, and with her arms about his neck forced him to sit, beseeching him to have patience, to let the men have their way, to attempt no violence

or they would kill him. He trembled with rage and weakness and grief, but he understood his powerlessness—which was merciful, for there was an angry stubbornness in the hurry and motions of the men which was as good as advising their captain, with a curse and a threat wrapped up in the hint, not to meddle with them, not to offer to hinder them if he valued his life.

Very promptly the lot emerged from the lazarette, bearing cases and sacks, hams, cheeses, and so forth. They no doubt guessed they'd come to want plenty of provisions should they miss the ship they were after. They ran headlong up the ladder, none heeding us, but not above two minutes afterwards the boatswain's burly figure showed in the companion-way, and he bawled down :

‘ Capt'n Burke, we're all ready, and there isn't a second to lose. Ain't you going to join us along with the ladies?’

He received no reply.

He repeated the question, roaring it out in a bull-like bellowing, and then came a step or two down the ladder to stretch his neck that he might see us. I cried out :

‘Are we to be left alone?’ for I cannot express the horror that chilled me when I thought of the sailors leaving us to save themselves, insomuch that they might be on board another ship sailing towards the sun ere the Southern Cross was trembling in the south that night, whilst the three of us who stayed—two of them women—might go on rolling about in a wrecked and crusted hull till she grew sodden and sank, or split against an iceberg.

‘Come you along with us, miss, if the captain and his wife won’t leave the vessel!’ cried the boatswain.

‘No!’ shrieked Mrs. Burke. ‘Would you expose a delicate young lady in these seas in an open boat? Fools are you yourselves to go. You’ll be heard of no more.’

The boatswain without another word withdrew his great developed bulk from the hatch, but he was instantly replaced by another figure, and Mr. Owen's voice, shrill with excitement and hurry, cried down:

'Mrs. Burke, Miss Otway, aren't you coming? They'll be putting off without you if you pause.'

'He does not ask my husband to join them,' screamed Mrs. Burke, 'the wretch! does he think I would leave my husband?'

Mr. Owen came swiftly down into the cabin and talked like a man in delirium.

'You have no right to keep this young lady with you. Captain Burke sticks to his hull from sordid motives. That's his lookout. Life's more precious than cargo. Miss Otway was entrusted to my care. I insist upon her being permitted to accompany us. Her father looks to me for her well-being. She is eager to go with us and you will not suffer it.' Thus he raved on.

'Leave this cabin,' cried the captain, springing up. His face was full of blood, his blue eyes blazed ; he had already been worked up into madness, and I was certain by his insane manner of starting from his chair, if the doctor did not go instantly the captain would destroy him.

But it was at that moment that the boatswain bawled on deck. 'Come up !' were the words I caught, sounding through the companion-hatch in a muffled note of thunder. 'Up with them who's going.' More was said which I did not hear.

'By keeping her, you are murdering her, and her blood is on your head!' cried Mr. Owen like a woman in a frenzy of passion, and rushed up the ladder.

'Don't believe him,' exclaimed Mrs. Burke, grasping my hand, with a wild, short, passionate laugh that had the note of an hysterick sob. 'You shall see the boat presently. You shall see it out upon the water.'

You will judge then who would kill you. Oh, not I, not I, my flower ; not I, your poor old nurse !'

I clasped her round the neck and sobbed. When I looked up Captain Burke had left the cabin.

We were apparelled for the deck, and finding the captain gone, we followed, and though scarcely five minutes had elapsed since the boatswain bawled, already the long-boat was some ship's lengths distant, bowed almost to the line of her lee rail by a great square of white canvas, shaded here and there where the moisture had not dried out of it. She looked full of people as she rose to the head of the folds, ripping through it with the icy breeze fresh off her bow, till the lift of the foam sparkled in a fountain-like arch right athwart her forward, and her speed raised two humps of froth on either quarter, and shot a long milk-white glance of wake, bright as a meteor's line of light, far astern of her, lifting

and falling on the swell, and defined to its extremity even amidst the smoke and snap of the running seas.

Captain Burke with one hand grasping the edge of the companion stood watching her. When we came up his first words were, after a brief pause :

‘They’ll overhaul the ship if they can only get a sight of her. Look how she sails, and how finely she is handled.’

‘She may be the means of saving us,’ cried Mrs. Burke. ‘What use were they on board of us? But they’re useful there. They’ll be sighted and rescued, and we shall be hunted after.’

But I did not want her nor her husband after I had watched the boat a little to tell me that, unless they quickly encountered succour, their situation, crowded together in a small exposed space, would be terrible. Also, since Mrs. Burke would not have left her husband, I should have been the only woman in her.

I cannot say how the mere sight of her as she swept onwards, dwindling as you gazed into a mere toy, regularly sinking out of sight till nothing showed but a gleaming curve of her topmast cloths, wan and slender as a distant sea-fowl's pinion, then taking the slope till she leaned, poised and foaming for a breathless instant, upon the flying summit : I cannot tell you, I say, how solemnly and awfully that mere toy, full of human beings, emphasised to my perception the vastness and the loneliness of this cold, green, heaving breast of ocean.

Captain Burke took the telescope out of the companion and swept the sea for some little distance on either hand the boat's bows, pausing on the lee side of the fabric where, my sight being good, I spied a point like a light tipping the sea-line against some dark clouds there whenever the hull soared.

'That's the ship,' said he, pointing. 'They may catch her ! Why, had I thought of it—

but who's going to make proposals to mutineers?—the scoundrels have stolen my only boat. How do they know in leaving us what's to become of us without a boat ?'

'Had you thought of what?' said his wife.

'I'd have given them a handful of rockets.'

We stood watching the boat till the white spot she became was one with the breaking seas. The hull looked indescribably forlorn. The sense of all life, saving us three, having gone out of her, brought a deeper spirit of desolation into her labouring shape. Oh, the heart-sickness that came into you out of her dismal regular rolling in the trough ! The swell lifted her, the seas burst upon her weather side as against a rock, broke into smoke, and smote the hollow they sprang from with the loud hissing of a hail squall. There was a constant dreary gleam of ice as the fabric swayed, pallid glares along her side, blue glancings from the long barbs at the

catheads ; the frozen snow the whole length of the deck had a shrewd keen sparkle. In places along the working line of the sea hung motionless the faint marble of bergs ; but long before the boat was lost to view the feather-tip of sail she was pursuing had vanished.

Captain Burke carefully and closely swept the horizon, then replaced the telescope.

‘A few hours often make a mighty difference at sea,’ said he. ‘By this time tomorrow we may be towing northwards.’

‘Have the men gone away without a compass?’ said Mrs. Burke.

‘The bo’sun owned a compass that was a curiosity of casting and graving : I remember he showed it to the mate. They’ll have taken that with them. And now,’ said he, speaking with more cheerfulness than I had observed in him for some days, ‘let us go below and get something to eat. There’s fuel enough to keep the stove going for a long spell. The hull’s as staunch as she was on the day we

sailed. Any moment you may see something that will look like ice climbing the sea into a whaler's breast of topsail and stump topgallant masts. So call things at their worst, miss,' said he, 'for then we may believe that their mending's at hand.'

Mrs. Burke and I went below; the captain remained on deck. Between us we dressed the dinner table. She did not want me to help her. She said it was her duty and joy to wait upon me. 'To think of Miss Marie Otway,' she exclaimed, 'laying a table-cloth and putting knives and forks upon the table that a plain merchant-skipper and his wife may dine.'

I kissed and went on helping her; any sort of occupation was welcome: for, argue as the captain and Mrs. Burke might, the abandonment of the wreck by the whole of the sailors had raised a horror in me, and filled my heart with deep secret distress and dread; so that, whenever I thought of our situation,

it was with a shudder at the emptiness of the rolling broken hull.

I believe the hour was not far from two o'clock. Already the gloom of the early antarctic night was in the cabin, but the lamp swung in flashes through the shadow, and you could only have told that the gloom was gathering when you looked at the portholes. We sat beside the stove waiting for Captain Burke ; by-and-bye his wife grew uneasy, and went on deck to seek him and call him down to dinner.

I was then alone, and sat very cold and wretched. I had been alone in this cabin before—that is, since the masts had gone ; but then there had been the tread of feet overhead, the knowledge of a plentiful, hearty life in the ship. Now all was as hushed as the tomb in that way.

After I had been waiting four or five minutes, I saw two small points of light in the gloom where a locker ended, and where

some few feet of ship's wall ran clear. I stared, suspecting an illusion, and then believed it was phosphorus or something jewelled with light by decay as rotten timber is. But on a sudden the two shining spots came stealing out into the whiskers and ribbed shape of a huge lean, grey rat. I jumped up with a shriek and the thing vanished.

My nerves gave way, and, marvelling at Captain and Mrs. Burke's absence, I went on deck to look for them, trembling with disgust and terror.

The daylight was small, but the snow along the decks made a whiteness in the air, so that perhaps even in the darkest hour you would be able to detect anything in motion betwixt the rails. Here and there about the leaden rolling ocean broke sudden glares of froth. The shadow had blended the sea-circle with sky, and nothing was visible save a smoky thickness of vapour breaking up to windward where it soared, and ashy in places with rain

or snow. I stood in the hatch and looked along the deck and saw nobody. This so frightened me that I shrieked out Mrs. Burke's name. Nothing answered. I trembled with dread and the bitter cold of the wind, and crossing the deck that I might have something to hold by, went forward, occasionally screaming out the name of Mrs. Burke, but never getting an answer.

The galley door was open : nobody was in it. I was half fainting with terror ; I could not imagine what had become of my companions. Was I alone in the ship ? Oh, never could I make you understand what my feelings were whilst I stood running my eyes first forward and then aft, straining along the ghostly slanting glimmer of the decks for a sight of one or another of my friends, hearing nothing but a strange moaning noise of wind in the sky, and the long rolling thunder of moving mountains of water, the early night darkening fast down all round, the closing in

upon the ghastly, weary, tumbling hull, lifting its bowsprit and splintered stumps of masts in postures of agony defined as existence itself could make them !

I had just sucked in my breath to send forth another scream, when I saw a figure in the little hatch called the forescuttle, which led into the forecastle.

‘ Who is that ? ’ I cried.

‘ Is that you, Miss Marie ? ’ called the voice of Mrs. Burke, and she rose through the hatch.

‘ I thought you were lost. I thought I was alone,’ I cried, beginning to sob with a sudden passion of hysterical relief.

‘ My husband went down into the forepeak to get some coal,’ said she, not perceiving that I cried. ‘ He asked me to help him by pulling up some buckets as he filled them. We are not quite done, but do not stay on deck, my dear. We shall be with you in a very few minutes now.’

On this I returned to the cabin, but much shaken, and so low-spirited, I had never before felt more miserable.

I entered the cabin with eyes a-search for the rat, and could not sit still beside the stove for thinking of the beast, for at every moment I was coining the lights of its eyes, the gaunt crouched shape of it, out of some shadow here or there; and if I saw it not in imagination, I figured it as under my chair. However, soon after I had returned, the captain and Mrs. Burke entered the cabin, the captain bearing two buckets and his wife one, full of coals.

‘Now,’ he exclaimed, ‘for a little wash after that job!’ and he took a kettle of water off the stove and carried it to his cabin. His wife followed him.

They came back soon and we sat down at the table. Whilst we ate Mrs. Burke explained how her husband had attached a block to a beam in the forecastle and rove a rope

through it with a hook at one end, and how, standing in the forecastle, she had hauled up the buckets as he filled them deep down in the forepeak.

I told them of the horrible rat I had seen.

'Don't let it scare you, miss,' said the captain. 'Rats at sea haven't the viciousness of the beasts ashore. They'll drown themselves in a man's savings of molasses. They'll creep into his bunk and nibble his toe-nails. That's about the worst that I can recollect. They may be destructive to ships and cargo, but they've got their instincts, and know when on the ocean they're dependent on sailors.'

He doubtless said this to hearten me. Mrs. Burke changed the subject by speaking of the melancholy appearance of the forecastle. The hammocks swung, she said, as though every one held a man ; the sailors' chests were scattered about, there was a smell of tobacco in the place as though the sailors had scarcely extinguished their pipes. The captain had

put out the forecastle lamp. It was alight when they entered. Not that it would have set fire to the ship. It was sputtering and smelling, with a thick coil of slush rank smoke spreading in a little cloud under the deck out of a small greasy flame.

‘The silence is shocking,’ she said to her husband. ‘I looked to see the heads of men peering at me over the edges of the hammocks.’

‘There may be heads of men nearer than we think,’ said he. ‘I’ll give ourselves a chance this night.’ He looked up at the clock under the skylight and seemed to calculate, and then said, ‘The boat went swiftly. She may have run into the ken of the ship—some box-ended waggon of a south seaman, no doubt, slow as a baulk of timber working to windward on a two-knot tide.’

‘What will you do?’ said his wife.

‘I’ll send up a rocket occasionally. If she picks up our people she might stand down to

look for us—she might. I'll do more,' he added after a pause. 'I'll give them a flare or anything else that may be a bright light to see us by—a lantern on the stump of the foremast, or, better still, under the bowsprit where it'll dance.'

'Can a hull like this remain long afloat?' said I.

'Ay, miss.'

'I thought when a vessel was dismasted she became a wreck, and went quickly to pieces.'

'Over and over,' said he, 'you may have heard, you must have read, of derelicts, whose log-books showed they'd been washing about for months, sliding north and south, east and west through the summers and winters of the ocean. A well-built ship is so hard to knock to pieces that when she's abandoned she's as dangerous to navigation as an uncharted rock. Again and again they talk of sending gunboats to blow derelicts to pieces and clear the road.'

They're hard to extinguish, even with gunpowder, as hard to expel as a madman's fancies. This craft is safe, believe me, and will provide us with a secure sea-home until we're fallen in with, which may be tomorrow.'

This sort of talk did me a world of good, and I began to cheer up and feel something like my old self. I was now used to the motion of the hulk, at least in such a sea as then ran, though a landsman coming on board for the first time would have been instantly thrown, so swift, abrupt, and shooting were the rolls. This afternoon we did not notice any particular weight in the race and lift of the swell and sea ; there had been a dumbness in the looks of the weather throughout the day, though a fresh wind blew with a flaying, razor-like edge of frost in it. Captain Burke said he expected a quiet night ; that is, no more wind than had blown through the day. He built up a good fire for us, and got his wife to boil some

coffee, whilst he fetched a number of rockets to carry on deck.

With the wish to amuse me he asked if I would like to see a rocket fired, and whilst Mrs. Burke made some coffee I followed him above. Night was upon the sea, and its shadow was as a wall for the ice spears along our rails to brandish their gleams upon. The captain fitted a candle-shaped thing into a rocket in the bulwarks near the wheel and fired it, and the rocket sprang high in a line of sparkles, leaving a red ball of flame floating close against the clouds, which reflected the radiance as though to a touch of sunset. I watched the red ball float down the wind and expire.

‘We’ll send up a second for luck,’ said the captain.

This was a white light and the dazzle of the flash was lightning-like : a thin long wake of the brilliance dimly glanced, serpentine, off the peaks and slants of the heaving waters

and the sky opened as to a star. But the night was the darker for that light when it went.

‘Now, who’s to tell,’ said Captain Burke, ‘what eye has seen those rockets? Never give up heart at sea, miss. We’ll go below for a cup of hot coffee, and then the brightest burning lantern aboard shall be made fast in some place where it can be seen.’

I returned to the cabin with a little spirit of elation working in me, a strange possession in the presence of that reeling shadow of frosted hull and the blackness winding round about, pallid here and there with the wild dim light of froth. It was occasioned, no doubt, by the sending up of the rockets, by some faint hope or fancy of their being seen, with a half-formed vision of the ship the crew that day had pursued staggering down towards us then, a pale shaft aslant, gaunt with lean canvas breasting slowly, with many eyes on the look-out.

The three of us sat drinking coffee, and our talk ran in the way of our deliverance. The captain named our chances.

‘Yes,’ cried I, ‘but if a ship should refuse to tow you, you will not surely remain on board this hull and keep us with you! Sooner——’

I broke off.

‘Sooner what, miss?’ said he, rounding his face upon me, crimson on one side of it with the fire.

‘Sooner than that we should remain here in the hope of saving the property you possess in the hull, I would give you under my hand an undertaking that my father will make good the amount of your loss.’

‘We’ll see you safe; we’ll see you safe,’ he exclaimed with a slow smile. ‘Anyhow, you’re better here than in the long-boat where you’d be if Mr. Owen could have had his way.’

‘Ay, if they’re not aboard a ship they are

cold now, I warrant, those poor men in that open boat,' exclaimed Mrs. Burke. 'And if the breeze should come on to freshen so as to fling spray over them, that must be the freezing part. Not to be able to get up and walk, and to feel the brine raining upon your back and hardening into a mask of ice about your neck !'

The captain got up, but as I did not watch him, I know not whether he went on deck or to a cabin. When he returned he held a large ship's lantern, a globe of white glass framed with metal. He fetched some oil from the pantry, carefully trimmed and then lighted the lantern.

'This will handsomely jewel the bowsprit,' said he. 'She'll make a starry dance of it there, toss it as proudly as though it were a gem on her brow, and she was still clothed in her last week's beauty of white wings. Heigh-ho ! 'Tis no time for fine fancies. Sit ye here, miss ; I'll not have you again expose yourself

above ; but, wife, you can rig yourself up so as to give me a ten minutes' hand on deck. I may want to seize a block to the bowsprit and run this light out.'

She clothed herself for the bitter cold, and bidding me not be afraid though a hundred rats should come and stare, she went up the steps after her husband in the almost noon tide light of the lantern that swung in his hand.

The emotion of light-heartedness was ended ; it had been but as the gleam of a star in black water on a cloudy night—the sky was folded up, my heart was dark again, I found no light nor life of hope in it. They say that hope springs eternal ; I vow to God then I felt as hopeless as if my end was at hand whilst I sat alone when they had gone to show a light on the hull. I closed my eyes that I might not see the rat should it come, and so, sitting with the glow of the fire upon my face, I beheld a vision of my house : it rose upon my darkened gaze ; I saw the

wintry scene of Channel waters, the glance of foam through the flying clouds of snow; I saw myself walking with my sweetheart upon the stretch of sands, pausing to gaze at the beauty of the forming breaker and to hearken to the cries of the skyful of blown gulls. I saw my father; but what I chiefly remembered was the sensation of bitter cold which had sunk chill to heart and marrow, when I entered for the first time the cabin I was now occupying.

I shivered and buried my face and rocked myself, my eyes still sealed. I may have lost thought of time in musing; I started, looked round, and found by the hour that they had been on deck nigh twenty minutes. I thought this was a long time for Captain Burke to keep his wife exposed, and still I concluded that the job of securing a lantern to the bowsprit might run into time aboard a dancing, jumping, slippery hulk; so I continued to wait, all the while straining my ears, till hearing was

made an anguish of by the constant cheats of sound.

I could bear it no longer. They had been absent half an hour and five minutes. I did not expect to hear their footfalls through the frozen snow on the planks ; nor would their voices reach me if they remained forward ; but why did not they come ? I waited another ten minutes, then went on deck.

I looked, and was almost paralysed with terror ; had I been an instant sooner, an instant later, it could not have been ; but my eye went to it as I rose through the hatch at the breathless moment of its happening—and this was it : low over the sea in some quarter I could not name hung the moon, red as the sun in fog ; she had just broken out through a mass of heavy black vapour ; a ragged edge as of scud was floating off her upper limb like a last lingering shadow of eclipse, as I looked ; and right athwart the orb, centering it, was

the body of a bird, doubtless an albatross ; and the instant picture was that of some wondrous, gigantic, glowing shield hanging over the sea, and approaching the hull on the back of a huge seafowl. But in a heart's beat the deception went : the bird whose distance created that marvellous illusive perspective curved in its flight and winged out of the illuminated circle and was gone, and in the next breath a lift of black stuff like the dingy smouldering of a candle-wick overspread the moon and hid her.

I looked along the deck, and as before, so now, I beheld nothing moving. I tried to reason with my terrors by supposing that the captain had again gone below to shovel up more coal, and that his wife waited in the forecastle to help him. But whilst I looked and strained my ears I heard a moan ; again and yet again it came ; I could not be mistaken. I went forward and heard the moaning whilst I advanced, and when I was close

to the galley I saw a figure on the forecastle and heard the moaning again.

I stepped close, my heart almost stopped, my blood almost frozen. The white of the deck made a light of its own, as I have told you, and I saw Mrs. Burke lying on her side. She lay close to the fluke of an anchor that was stowed upon the forecastle on the starboard, or right-hand side. She moaned and continued to moan ; I dropped on my knees, and grasping her hand cried, with my face close to hers to see if her eyes were open, for her moaning was that of a dying person : ‘It is I. What has happened ? Are you ill ? Where’s your husband ?’

She answered feebly, moaning at every other word :

‘He has fallen overboard. He went on to the bowsprit with a lantern and slipped. Oh, God, my heart breaks, my heart breaks ! I ran and fell and I cannot rise. I have lost him—oh, my heart !’

I cried in a passion of horror and terror, ‘Captain Burke drowned !’ and then, figuring him battling for life alongside, I sprang to my feet and went to the rail and looked over. But there was nothing to be seen save an inky cloudiness of moving waters, shaping and dissolving, and a dim light of foam when the ship’s bows pitched, and there was no other sound but that of the washing of brine pouring along the side, and a noise of wind overhead.

I went back to Mrs. Burke and knelt by her again, and cried :

‘ Cannot you rise that I may help you to get to the cabin ? ’

She moaned, but did not speak.

Then my heart gave way wholly, and as I knelt by her side I clasped my hands, and looked up into the darkness, and cried out of my loneliness : ‘ What shall I do ? What shall I do ? ’

CHAPTER XII

MR. SELBY TAKES UP THE STORY.

HAVING been blown considerably to the southward of our course by a succession of hard northerly gales, the barque 'Planter,' from London to Adelaide, on a dark, bitter, raw morning of July 1860, was breaking the seas close hauled, looking up for as much northing as the seating of the wind would allow.

Our long topgallant masts were down on deck, and we showed nothing above the top-mast cross-trees. Under single-reefed topsails and reefed foresail we rolled sluggishly onwards, making small way ; the swell was wide and strong, but the wind blew without spite, save for its edge, and the seas ran small.

My name is Ralph Selby. I was chief mate of that barque, a vessel of four hundred and sixty tons, Walter Parry, master, John Newman, second mate. I had charge of the forenoon watch, and it was now about nine o'clock, but dark as at any hour of the night. All my sight had been going for ice whilst it remained black ; throughout this had been so with the rest of us, since seven o'clock of the preceding evening we had nearly fallen foul of ice mountains three times. At midnight, indeed, the air being then like fog with snow, a loud and fearful cry from the forecastle had preserved us by the dark of our nails, we were in time by a few heart beats only ; the whole mass looked aboard us as we surged past with our helm hard up, floating off on a heave of black fold that carried us clear, though it nearly thumped the channels off our sides with the lumps of loose ice it滑 us into. The paleness of that mountain went up into the sky high above our mast-heads ; the

roar of the sea bursting at its base was louder than any surf I ever heard ashore; rock-blasting shocks in thunder echoes came out of the heap, which perhaps sank two leagues backwards into the blackness.

We drove clear and lost it, but for the rest of the night those who had the watch kept staring with all their eyes.

Whilst I leaned over the side searching the darkness off the bow, there broke over the starboard quarter the cold pale day of that desolate part of the world. The dim light seemed to sift to the zenith through the clouds like steam under the rolling sky. In twenty minutes it was daylight all round, the ocean a dirty freckled green, swollen in folds, and flashful with the short running seas of the then light breeze. The horizon opened into a hard green distance, working like a revolved corkscrew against the stooping soot past it, though overhead it was middling fine weather, streaks of dim green sky veining,

into a look of marble, a surface of compacted yellow stuff; down which the brown scud was sailing south-west.

Crossing the deck to peer to leeward, I instantly caught sight of a sail, a white square of canvas which, coming and going this side the horizon, puzzled me during the moments I kept my naked eye upon it. I fetched the glass and on pointing it resolved the object into a ship's long-boat, full of people. She was heading to close us, but did not look as though she lay nearer than we; I observed no distress signal. I thought I could count eight or nine heads. The gleam of oilskins came off the men as the boat lifted. With the sheet flattened right aft the little fabric shredded through it nobly, flinging the water away in smoke, and rising with the dance and skill of the galley-punt of the Downs to the head of every hurdling sea.

The sight of her put a full spirit of civilisation into the desolate scene; and yet I

guessed that exquisite distress lay dumb for distance only in that open leaping boat, gone now behind a hill of brine, now straining her square of cloths aslant on a rolling peak.

I sang out to the fellow at the wheel to let her go off by a point, and was going to make my report to the captain when he appeared. His eye caught the boat in a moment, and exclaiming, ‘What have we here?’ he levelled the glass and said:

‘Pretty nigh a whole ship’s company adrift.’

We closed her rapidly and were presently within hail.

‘Take us aboard for God’s sake, sir! Half of us are dead with the cold,’ cried a lamentable voice, no man, whoever he was that spoke, rising nevertheless.

We manœuvred that she might sheer alongside; we then backed our topsail yard and her sail dropped with a run. But the men seemed scarcely to have life enough to

catch hold of the coil of rope that was flung to them, and then when she lay hard by you saw by the rise of her to the height of our top-gallant sail, then by the fall of her into a hollow twenty feet deep, that if those men were to be rescued they must be whipped aboard.

So a tackle was secured to the main yard-arm, and the rope slackened away to let the boat soar and sink fair under the whip ; the captain then sang out for the strongest to send the weakest, themselves following. A huge, fine fellow with red whiskers answered with a paralytic flourish of his hand, and without delay the whip end was secured to one of the people and quickly as might be he was swayed aboard.

I was too busy with superintending these proceedings to do more than glance at the first of them as they hauled him over the side ; and just took notice that he was a short man, cloaked and thickly wrapped, with bushy hair, not a sailor, and he looked frozen to

death. He was carried into the cabin and another man was got aboard ; he too seemed lifeless. There were nine or ten, I am not sure. One by one we swayed them over the rail, the last man to come being the big fellow with the red whiskers.

Those who seemed dead—of these there were four—were carried into the cabin ; the others who were able to crawl were helped into the forecastle.

‘What’s to be done with the boat, sir ?’ said I to the captain.

‘Oh, what can be done with her ?’ said he, with a shrug and an askant look of longing at the fine little craft. ‘We should drown her if we towed her, and we can do nothing with her now. Let her go.’

I went forward by the captain’s orders and saw to the men who had been sent into the forecastle. Hot grog and food were given to them ; they were partially unclothed and chafed and wrapped in blankets. The only

one who did not seem to need this care was the burly, red-whiskered seaman. He had stripped himself of his waterproofs, and after swallowing a couple of steaming glasses of grog, and eating pretty heartily of cold beef and biscuit, he asked for some warm water to wash the frost out of his face ; which done, he fell to clapping his arms upon his breast, and shooting them out to right and left, kicking his legs about likewise ; then turning upon me who stood watching, he said he was ready to step aft and spin his yarn to the captain.

We were a barque with a short poop ; I took him into the cuddy, and there left him in order to look after the ship, so that I did not learn the story of this crew until a little while after he had related it to the captain. When I regained the poop the boat was showing and vanishing some distance astern. It made me shudder to think of exposure in her in these seas, and under the wild sky that was stormily sipping the sea-line with its

black lips of vapour, though on high, over our staggering mast-heads, the heavens continued to lie a little open.

I saw them coming and going with steaming stuff from the galley, and guessed they were ministering to the poor frozen wretches in the cuddy. By-and-by the red-whiskered man went forward, and a little later up came Captain Parry. He approached me, and with a shocked look on his honest sailorly face said :

‘I’m afraid three of the four are dead. We can’t put any life into them. The fourth man stirred after some chafing, and when some hot grog had been spooned down his throat, and he’s now got his mind. But I don’t like to think how it’s going to prove with him ; his fingers and thumbs look to be mortified, and if his boots are pulled off his toes ’ll come away.’

‘Which man is that, sir?’

‘The first man we got aboard, a man with bushy hair. He was doctor in the ship.’

‘And the others are dead?’

‘I never saw a frozen to death body. Newman says they’re dead. He’s been groping after any hint of life and finds none.’

John Newman, as I have said, was our second mate. He had been bred to medicine, changed his mind, and gone to sea at two-and-twenty, and was now, at the age of thirty, with a master’s certificate of competency in his desk, earning five pounds a month as third in charge of a little barque. We all looked up to Newman as a medical authority; he had during the passage doctored some of us very skilfully; in pronouncing the man dead he knew what he was talking about.

‘This is their yarn,’ said the captain, and now I repeat in brief what he related.

Their ship was the ‘Lady Emma.’ She sailed from the Thames April 2. A few days before this time—namely, on July 2—she was thrown on to her beam ends by a terrific squall;

they cut away to right the ship and all three masts went smack-smooth saving the foremast, of which there remained a jagged stump of some twelve foot. To this next day they secured an arrangement of boom and square-sail, which blew over the bows on the wind suddenly freshening.

The captain was a little broken in his spirits and weakened in his intellect by this calamity; also it was said forward that it weighed upon him to remember that a strange man wearing his face and aspect had walked on the forecastle one night. His hope was to blow north and fall in with something that would give him a tow to a port, he (it was understood) having a considerable uninsured venture in the vessel. The crew sickened of his notion, seeing no good nor hope in it; and on catching sight of the topmost canvas of a ship they launched a long-boat, hastily provisioned her, and went away in pursuit, leaving behind the master,

his wife and a young lady passenger: but through no fault of the men, as the captain and the others declined to accompany them.

They lost the ship and wore for the hull afresh, missed her, and stood north-east by a compass which did not appear to have been very trustworthy. They were exposed for two nights and very nearly two days, and another night must have killed them all. The dead men were the steward, a Dutch seaman who had been ill for weeks with rheumatism, and another.

‘How should the wreck bear now, do you think?’ said Captain Parry.

I reflected, and after recalling the weather, and estimating the boat’s sailing powers and the like, I answered if she was to be sought she might be found about one hundred and fifty miles distant west-south-west.

‘I make her further than that,’ said the captain.

‘Perhaps so, sir.’

‘But your bearings about tally with mine. I think it’s our duty to give those people a chance for their lives. Three of them! and two of the three, women, Mr. Selby! And the passenger, I understand from Wall the bo’sun, is the daughter of an English baronet—the skipper’s wife was her old nurse—she was sent out for her health.’

He looked thoughtfully round the sea, then told me to get the yards braced in, and going to the wheel, shifted the course, making a fair wind of the breeze, and the ship drove along.

The main difficulty lay in the shortness of the time of daylight. We were not going to hunt for a large becalmed craft, clothed like a pyramid to the trucks, and courting the eye like an iceberg, but for a low dismasted hull, which might slide past us within musket-shot in some hour of blackness, and no man dream it was near. But the captain was resolved to give the poor people a chance: there could be

no question that the master of the ship, his wife, and a young lady were alive, locked up, helpless and hopeless, aboard a hull which at any hour might float away in staves from the side of an icehill ; and it was right, it was our duty, it was a service that God would expect of us, that humanity required of us, to search, even at some peril to ourselves—loss of time counting for nothing when the errand is one of mercy—seeing that the hull lay, perhaps, within two hundred miles off, and her inmates in a situation to continue alive for a long while, the boatswain Wall having told Captain Parry that she was plentifully stocked with coal, provisions, and liquor.

All that day, till night blackened out the scene, we kept an eager watch upon the sea. It held fairly clear, a slender promise overhead in greenish streaks of an opening heaven, though the horizon scowled with snow-clouds. We sighted several icebergs, but saw nothing of the wreck. When it fell dark that after-

noon, we shortened sail to two close-reefed topsails, furling the foresail, and rolled onwards slowly. The swell was high and ran strong from the westward, but the sea curled lightly. A few wan stars blinked in the rifts. The cold was intense. The rigging seemed to take a new thickness of ice when the night came, and the running gear was as stiff as bar-iron in the shears.

I guessed that Captain Burke (as I was told his name was) would show a light every night : he had lanterns and oil and an altitude that, with his freeboard, might give him twenty feet above the water in his stump of foremast. But we searched in vain for a sparkle. For my part, I took but a half-hearted view of the quest ; yet it was a thing not to be omitted by an English seaman: no man of the slenderest mercy of heart would have foregone it.

I had charge of the middle watch, and being a man of some imagination, I cast my

mind into the misery of the poor people who were somewhere out upon those black, swollen waters in a flat wallowing hull, and I shuddered and grieved when I thought of them. The life of a lofty superstructure of masts and spars, with canvas to spread or reduce at will, was in our ship ; I felt the buoyant rise of her on hills of ink rolling invisible ; I'd step aft to search the gloom astern and on either quarter, and mark the dim snow of the wake sheeting to the taffrail with the droop of her stern, and hear the grind of the wheel-chains, and see the illuminated disc of card trembling the course at the lubber's mark betwixt faithful oscillations, as though it were the spirit of the ship, naked and shining, and revealed in all its sublime guiding and informing motions ; and then my mind would go again to that dismantled hull somewhere out in the freezing blackness here or there, a coffin of a ship with three live people locked up in it !

It came on to blow in hissing snow-squalls a

little before daybreak. I got two hours' sleep after eight o'clock and turned out for a mouthful of breakfast: when that meal was ended, the dull day had whitened through the snow upon the skylight glass, and in a cabin window I saw the sea, lifting close with the ship's lurches, rolling astern and quickly out of sight into the blowing flakes.

The captain came below: he shook the snow off him by the stove and said:

'No signs of the hull. Nothing can be done if the weather don't clear. It's as thick as smoke all round, and if we go on making southing in this fashion we shall be running down the South Shetlands.'

'To pick up a wreck like this, sir,' said I, 'you may need to cross and re-cross your track a hundred times over.'

'I should never be able to sail away with a good conscience either,' said he. 'To leave three people to wash about down here, to perish certainly after a horrible time of it!'

Though it should cost a week of cruising to rescue them—'twould be like murder.'

He stepped into his cabin with unsettled looks and a face of agitation.

He was one of the humanest men I ever met whether at sea or ashore. He was not what would be called a gentleman by birth, but he was a man of God's best moulding, a simple, generous, just person, beloved of his crew, his officers' friend and companion, and their kindly counsellor as well as commander. I never heard a coarse word escape him nor a harsh one to even the most provoking of his people. He was an honour to the flag of his Service.

When I went on deck the weather had somewhat cleared round the ship, but the snow was whirling grayly against the soft dark thickness to leeward, whilst the windward sky was black with cloud of a true Horn pattern, low-flying, shredding off its edges, and swollen with burdens of hail and sleet.

I went to the starboard rail to take a long, careful look round, never knowing but that all on a sudden, in a flying way, the hull might leap into sight out of some green trough dim with salt breeze. Mr. Newman, heavily clad in sea boots and yellow oilskins, was standing for shelter under a square of canvas seized in the mizzen rigging. For my part I never wore an oilskin in my life. I was to-day clothed as I always went in bitter weather, north or south: in a thick pilot coat, thick pilot cloth trousers, a warm fur cap with ear-covers, thick mittens, and a shawl round my neck.

I was straining my sight into the whirling gray thickness over the bow, the ship then being under two close-reefed topsails and stern main trysail, and surging over the high swell and through the broken rugged seas at about five knots; when a man who was descending the starboard fore-shrouds with a coil of rigging round his neck missed a ratline with

his foot and slapped at another with his hand : it parted at the seizing and he fell overboard backwards.

In the swift glance I had shot, my sight being already bent that way, I saw the ratline he had clapped hold of stand out from the shroud like a bar of steel.

I roared ‘ Man overboard ! ’ and shouted to the fellow at the wheel to put the helm hard down. In the same breath I caught a lifebuoy off its pin and flung it at the body of the man who was then floating on the top of a swelling fold within a pistol-shot astern, fast sliding off. This buoy, like others in the ship —a device of the captain’s—when it struck the water freed a red staff with a length of red bunting attached : the staff stood up on the buoy and the streamer like a tongue of fire blowing out made a beacon for a swimmer as well as for a boat in daylight.

Meanwhile the second mate was yelling for all hands and bawling ‘ Man overboard ! ’

and shouting for seamen to lay aft and heave the vessel to. The captain came running up on deck. I called the tragic news to him, pointing aft, and then sprang for a jolly-boat as we termed the thing, which hung in davits upon the starboard quarter. A number of men came crowding around; the boat was swiftly cleared away, and I and three sailors jumped into her.

‘Keep all fast till way is lost,’ shouted the captain. ‘Stand by to unhook handsomely or she’ll drown ye.’

In a few minutes, which seemed as long as months, the boat sank to the water’s edge and was waterborne: a sea lifted her half-way to her davits again; in that upward rush we unhooked, got oars over, and away we went for the red streamer which I could see faintly glimmering through a mist of spume.

She was a fat lubberly boat, better for this work than our longer whale-ended quarter-boats. She jumped like something alive and

distracted, sometimes sped end on, made with headlong plunges into the valleys, sweeping up the acclivity with her nose to the sky, doing her work dryly but so wildly that the men could scarcely plunge their blades for a drag upon her. A couple of spare oars were lashed along her bottom under the thwarts. I had nearly cut them adrift, meaning to help the others, fisherman-fashion, with one, and I never cease to thank my God I did nothing of the sort.

I steered for the man, but he was not to be seen. I had never from the moment of marking him fall doubted that he had plumbed the bottom like a lead, weighted as he was with heavy sea boots, painted clothes, and a coil of rigging round his neck ; but it was not to be admitted : the man was overboard, the ship was to be hove-to, and the poor fellow searched for and saved if so willed.

All in a breath, when we were within fifty strokes of the streaming red flag, the boat was

capsized on an apex of pyramidal sea, that poled her sheerly bottom up at the instant that a blinding snow-squall came seething along, whitening the water into hissing salt, and thickening down the sea within a biscuit-toss. This I had been observing at the very instant the boat was flung keel up, and I recollect that I carried the memory of that scene of snow-squall under water, scarce realising but that I was in a dream, happening as it did too swiftly to give the mind time to catch a hold on reality.

When I came to the surface I was bubbling and spitting in a smother of froth hard against the side of the boat. There were two others. I got my senses quickly and sputtering the brine out of my mouth roared, ‘We must right her. We can’t hold on. We shall freeze off her dead men in five minutes. Together now.’

The three of us got a hold of the keel, and a sea helping us, we righted her, swaying

down upon the little fabric with the strength of the madness that fights for life ; but in righting she struck one of the men under, and he went down like a shot whilst I and the other got into the boat.

A large copper baler attached to a lanyard lay at the bottom. I plunged my hand down, groped for, and found it, and fell with fury to casting out the water, the other baling with his sou'-wester with all his might. The sea repeatedly broke over us, but we toiled with superhuman effort for our lives. I believe the filled boat would have sunk under our united weight but for a couple of empty breakers secured in the bows and aft. We laboured with rage, flashing the water out of the boat, and presently she was showing some little height of side. Then to slenderly provide against a second surprise of capsizal which would signify certain death to us, I lashed the two spare oars that were under the thwarts to the painter and chucked them

overboard ; this brought the boat head to sea, and we went on baling.

The spite of the squall had gone out of the wind, but it was snowing heavily, and strain my sight as I would I could see nothing of the ship. In a flaw in the thick feathery fall I caught sight of the red tongue of bunting ; the buoy then was about a cable's length distant ; it was closed out quickly and all became a tumbling, gyrating blackness ; yet I had drawn some faint comfort from the sight of it. I guessed the ship could not be far off and that she must spy us the instant it cleared, which might happen at any minute. Meanwhile we baled for our lives.

My companion was an able seaman named Tom Friend. After he had been throwing out the water for some while, when the boat was perhaps still about a quarter full, I meanwhile baling with the same sort of fury that possesses a drowning man when he clutches

and catches and beats in the air for life, he said to me :

‘Mr. Selby, if we aren’t rescued soon I’m a dead man.’

‘No, no, keep up your spirits,’ I shouted. ‘They’ll have us. Bale, man. We must keep afloat to be picked up.’

He went to work afresh with his sou’wester, stooping and flinging ; the wind smote the brine into smoke as we hove it over the side. We did not cease till but a little water was left in the bottom of the boat, and we sat and gasped and stared about us.

I know not how long this business had occupied. It seemed to me that the shadow of the night was already in the air. It may have been no more than the darkness of the thick black cloud out of which the snow was tumbling in immense flakes. All the time I was expecting to see the dye of the ship’s fabric oozing out of the whiteness, plunging out of the smother into her clear shape with-

in easy earshot of us; but that did not happen.

After we had been in this situation about two hours Friend put his two hands together, and began to waggle his body as he sat on the midship thwart fronting me; his face was blue. He made shocking grimaces of anguish and fell-a-moaning most piteously, crying: 'Oh, the cold! Oh, the cold! Oh, Jesus, support me! I can't stand it!'

Though my own sufferings were inexpressible, I was still sensible of a good stock of vitality; but I cannot tell why I should have better resisted the cold than Friend, who was a lump of a man, broad-backed as a table, though a little stout. I was soaked to the skin, and coat and breeches were already frozen hard upon me; they cracked when I stirred as glass might. The thwarts were glazed and ice half an inch thick sheathed the timber.

Friend let his sodden and frozen sou'-

wester lie ; and he looked wild and dreadful with icicles pendent from his hair. In a sudden sharp leap of the boat to the summit of an ugly sea, that broke and curled white as milk on a line with our gunwales, he pitched towards me, slipped over the thwart he struck, and lay motionless at my feet. He groaned twice but spoke not.

What could I do ? Chafe his hands ? As well the thwart he had been flung over. I had not a drop of spirit for his throat, and myself felt dying. I could not but let him lie, and I believe he gave up the ghost very shortly after he had uttered his second groan.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HULL

AFTER Friend had lain at my feet for about an hour I stripped the oilskins off the body and put them on; they diminished the sense of deadly cold. I dragged the body into the bows, and after baling hard sat down, sure that my death was at hand, but seeking consolation in the thought that suffering ceases somewhat before you die of cold, and that death from this cause is as easy as drowning after the first agony.

It never ceased to snow until the night fell, and then when it was black the weather cleared—that is, I could see the flash of froth at a distance; but stare as I might I beheld nothing of the ship, no smudge nor deeper dye

upon the darkness anywhere to indicate her presence. I stood up and looked and looked, waiting for the toss of the sea to strain my gaze; then, with an awful despair in my heart, and the full rushing weight of my doom upon my spirits, I threw myself down into the stern sheets to die.

That I should have lived through that night is the miracle of my life. There is no lack of suffering in the maritime records, but I vow that mine in those hours of darkness which I passed in that open boat is not to be topped, though it may be matched. Perhaps it was that all my organs were sound, whilst Friend perished from the shock of immersion, and from failure of some vital power—doubtless the heart.

Be this as it may, I lived through that night and through the icy darkness of the morning, till daylight came crawling in a sallow green over the sky, low, broken and flying. It might be that Friend's oilskins preserved my

life by excluding the needle-like tide of frost-black wind from my flesh. When it was fairly daylight I stood up. My sight was clear ; but I felt as though formed of stone. I could poise my figure to the wild leaping of the boat, but I could not lift my arms : each shoulder felt brittle as glass ; it seemed to me that if either limb should be grasped and pulled, it must break short off.

The body of Friend lay ghastly in the bows. It was on its side, the cheek on the floor of the boat, and every time the little craft dived, the water in her boiled about the figure, which bristled with ice, and the head seemed nailed to the bottom boards by long spikes of crystal. I could not bear it, and made a step to cast it overboard, but, finding my arms helpless, stood still and looked round for the ship.

No wilder, drearier dawn ever broke over that cold, stormy, and desolate ocean. I guessed the wind about north ; a strong wind,

with a shriek as shrill as salt as it fled spray-charged past the ear, flaying as though it were a naked edge of sharp steel. A large squall was darkening the sea to leeward of the boat; when I was thrown up I saw the dim whiteness of ice in several places. I gazed slowly around in a broken way, for in every other breath there stood a wall of water betwixt me and the horizon.

All on a sudden when my eyes went astern I saw, not above a mile distant, a dark object: it reared and sank, came and went; sometimes froth leapt in a light of snow about it. I stared, scarcely daring to hope as yet that it was more than an illusion of the vision, a reappearing shape of green surge, a hard reforming moulding of brine, looking like—looking like—

And then with a short choking cry of transport I recognised it. It was the dismasted hull: that wreck of the ‘Lady Emma’ we had been in search of.

I watched her to make sure, dreading some cheat of delirious imagination—but it was the wreck: I marked her rise with the sea, a firm, defined, black shape against the root of the thick large squall that was blowing to leeward of her. A dim sheen of the gloomy day was in her wet side or sheathing as she soared, heeling not above a mile off and dead to leeward.

The sight gave life to my dead limbs, as it put spirit into my dying heart. I got the use of my arms and hands with a sudden frenzy of resolution, like to the effect of the panic terror that will compel a bedridden man to rise, though till thus started he has lain helpless as the mattress he springs from. I went into the bows, and getting hold of the body of Friend turned it over the gunwale. The corpse as I have said was that of a stout burly man, yet I found it light as a baby. How was that? Unless it was that the strength of half a dozen had come into me

with the passion of life and hope the sight of the wreck had inspired.

I pulled in the pair of oars the boat had been riding to and took my chance of the broadside send of sea ; the fierce sweep and sharp angle nearly flung me overboard, and thrice whilst I was clearing the oars which were heavy and difficult with ice, the boat was almost capsized. In a few minutes I got an oar over the stern and sculled the boat's head round for the wreck. She shot forward, and I sat square that my back might break any smaller sea which should foam tall and curl faster than the boat could rise. For the rest—for the peril of a great sea, for the swamping by seething waters uniting on either side the gunwale—I was in God's hands.

The wind and the sea swept me so swiftly onwards that the hull was close ahead all on a sudden, a large black mass, rolling heavily with violently quick recoveries ; she lifted her channels foaming, and again and again a sea

shot up her side in a height of white brine, which blew into the water on the other side of her in a cloud like steam. There was nothing for it but to drive for her stem on and take my chance. I tore off the oilskins for the freer use of my limbs, and when I was close to the wreck, having headed the boat fair for the main-chains, I sprang forward and seized the end of the painter ; the boat's nose smote the hull as she was roaring from me. I got a turn with the painter round a chain plate ; the boat swung in, but so swift were the motions of the hull that she was rolling down upon me even in that time, and, letting go the painter, I jumped in a single bound into the chains and was stumbling over the rail, spiked with ice, as the hulk swept her streaming side out again from the sea, with such a slant of deck that if I had not flung myself into a squatting posture and made the athwartship run of the hard frozen surface on my hams, I must have broken my neck or fled sheer over-

board through the openings where the bulwarks had been smashed level.

I was crazy with hunger and thirst and cold, and could think of nothing but shelter and food and drink. I took a hurried look along the deck hoping to see smoke from the galley or cabin chimney, for I reckoned of course upon finding the three people the 'Planter' had searched for alive in this hull. I saw no signs of life. I cautiously crawled aft, and coming to the companion-way tried to open it; the doors were thickly glazed, whence I judged they had been kept closed for some time. I pulled out my clasp knife—all that I carried was in my pocket as it had been before the boat capsized—and after scraping and dislodging the ice in sheets like plate glass, I got one of the companion-doors open and descended, pulling the door to behind me.

After the long hours of exposure and the ceaseless crackling noises of warring waters,

the shelter, the comparative warmth and stillness down here, were like the gift of a new life. It was dark, yet not so gloomy but that I could see. The daylight lay upon the snow on the skylight, and that large square of whiteness sifted a sort of dim illumination of its own into the dusk.

My first look was for those whom the boatswain Wall had told us the crew left behind them when they abandoned the hull. Nobody was here. An unlighted lamp swung violently over the table. I beheld a dull gleam of looking-glasses upon the ship's side, and thought in the glance I cast round that I could make out the equipment of a small, comfortable state cabin. I quickly spied a rack half circling the trunk of the mizzen-mast ; in it were some decanters ; three were half full of red and yellow wine. I put the mouth of one to my lips and drank heartily of its contents, but whether it was claret or sherry I could not say ; excessive thirst

seemed to have robbed my palate of the power of tasting. I then went straight to the first cabin my eye rested upon, intending to go the rounds for the pantry; but this cabin proved to be the pantry, where, after a short hunt, I found cheese, biscuit, preserved meat, and jams. I fell to wolfishly, breaking off only to fetch another decanter of the wine from the cabin.

. And now having eaten with a dangerous heartiness, and drank as much as would have brimmed two tumblers, I stepped into the cabin, refreshed and warm, a new man, almost my old self again, needing little more to perfectly comfort me than a shift of clothes, which might be obtained by seeking. But first I stood still, holding by the table to listen. I heard nothing but the sounds of the labouring of the hull. Had the captain and the two women been taken off the wreck? I should have believed so but for having found the companion-doors closed and glazed; ice could

not have collected to the thickness I had found it had people been coming and going by the companion-way. And yet it is true they might have been taken off, and before going some one of the rescuing party had closed the companion-door with a kick or a thrust as he stepped on deck.

I saw no fire in the stove ; the lamp was out ; it did not seem as if there were human life in the hull. I went to a door on the starboard side, the next to or second door past the pantry, and entered a berth. I could scarcely see. The porthole was submerged every other moment and the sight blinded with a sudden plunge of foam-thick twilight. After gazing awhile I made out that this berth had been occupied by the captain and his wife. I observed a quantity of male and female apparel hanging from a row of pegs running along the bulk-head ; also I made out two bunks, a table with certain navigating appliances upon it, a couple of chronometer

cases on a shelf, and sundry other matters not worth cataloguing. I lifted a locker, and after groping came across some flannel garments and under-linen. If the captain were aboard I guessed that in any case he would give me leave to help myself, so, after feeling over the clothes upon the bulk-head, I shifted to the frozen flesh of me.

Scarcely was I warmly and dryly clothed, when so heavy a drowsiness came upon my eyelids that I could instantly have sunk upon the deck in a sound sleep. But first I was resolved to ascertain the condition of the hull ; likewise whilst it was daylight to see if there were any signs of the ‘Planter,’ and if the weather gave me any promise of her. The idea of falling into a trance-like sleep which might run into hours, from which, for all I could tell as things stood, I should be awakened by finding myself strangling in a cabin full of water, and the hull already fathoms under, put such a fear and horror

into my spirits as enabled me to thrust back into my brain the heavy, stupefying weight of slumber, that was making my eyes ache as though the balls of vision had been wrung and unseated. I shook my body as a dog does when fresh from the water, and beat my arms upon my breast with all my strength ; then, with a wild yawn, strode into the state-room and went up the steps.

The first thing I saw was the boat I had gained the wreck in : she was flinging and leaping upon the seas about a hundred fathoms off on the port quarter ; being light and released she had blown away quickly. Every time a surge forked her on high the pouring blast smote and swirled her further yet to leeward. This would go on till she filled. I hardly took thought of her, abhorring her as I did as the theatre of that drama of anguish and hopelessness I had been forced to act in during the long black hours of the past night : and yet I very well

understood that she had been bound to go adrift, as I had taken but a slippery turn with the painter round the chain plate at the instant when the hull brought her main chains crushing down upon me for that spring by which I had saved my life.

I crossed to the port bulwarks to hold on by: t'other side was full of ugly yawns and rents, a dangerous, ragged wreckage of bulwark through which down the ice-hard slant a man would shoot, with a sudden roll, to his death. The galley was standing: all the boats were gone: the wheel and binnacle remained, and the apparatus of the helm looked sound. The decks were littered with frozen gear. Nothing showed of the main and mizzen masts but a barbed block, scarce a foot high above the mast-coats. But the stump of the foremast rose to perhaps twelve feet. The pumps were frozen: the sounding rod lay close to, but I could do nothing with it. Yet, as an old hand, I could feel the life

of a ship in my feet, and I was sure, by the hull's buoyant jumps, her cork-like recovery from the headlong dives, and the loneliness of her rolls that there was nothing in the water she had drained in so far to make me uneasy.

Cheered by this conviction, I pushed forwards, clawing along by the pins in the rail, by whatever else came to my hand, till I was abreast of the galley, whose port sliding-door lay half open, and going to it and looking in, there on the deck I saw lying on her back the body of a woman. I peered close, the light being weak. The body was warmly but plainly clothed; the colour of the face fresh as though she slept. I should not have guessed her dead by her looks: it was her lying there that made me know it. She seemed a woman of between forty and forty-five, flat of face, treble-chinned, and she showed as a person that had been fat and heavy in life.

The sight startled me : I had not thought to find anything dead. Had she been the wife of the captain ? Where was *he* ? And where the young lady that had sailed as passenger with them ? Were they both lying frozen in other parts of the vessel ? But there yet remained two or three cabins below to look into.

I came out of the galley shocked and low-spirited, and, still pushing forward, came to the forecastle and called down the hatch. I got no answer and descended. Here I found a number of hammocks, a few sea chests, and some odds and ends of seamen's apparel scattered about the deck. The forecastle lamp swung black under its grimy beam. I could scarcely see. Water—though no depth of it—seethed over the planks as the vessel pitched and rolled : this water I reckoned had tumbled down the forecastle hatch, and when I returned on deck I drew the slide of the scuttle over.

I went to the stump of foremast that was ringed with some pins, and holding on by one of them, looked round and round the sea, waiting for every lofty heave to dart my glances ; but there was nothing in sight save ice, the peaks of bergs afar, coming and going past the rounds of the swell, and the rush of the surge flickering into foam. It was blowing half as strong again as it had been an hour before, and the seas were racing with a weight and spite of headlong yeast which must have drowned me out of hand in the jolly-boat. A low sky of thick black cloud coiling, revolving, like sooty pourings from countless factory chimneys, was sweeping southwards. I crawled aft for the shelter of the cabin—the wind was marrow-freezing ; and scarce was I within the comparative warmth and stillness of the interior, when slumber again oppressed me ; and nature now giving out I stretched myself upon a cushioned locker and was asleep in a minute.

When I awoke I started instantly into an upright posture, beholding a figure gazing at me ; in some muddled fashion I seemed to realise my situation, whilst I imagined that the cabin was half full of people who had come to save me. Then, getting my wits fully, I made out that the person who stood close was a young woman. Her figure was inclined towards me, and so she stood despite the swaying of her with the motions of the deck : it was a posture of fear, incredulity, amazement, incommunicable in words.

It was too dim in that cabin to note more of her than that incomparable attitude of fright and astonishment.

It had been past noon when I lay down to sleep : the strong feeling of refreshment within me was assurance, true as the sun's evidence could have been, that I had slept through more than the two remaining hours of daylight. It was daylight now, consequently I understood that whatever might be

the hour, I had been sleeping since noon on the previous day.

I stared at the girl, for a young girl I now perceived her to be, and exclaimed :

‘Are you Miss Otway?’

‘Oh !’ she shrieked, ‘have you come to save me?’ and she dropped on her knees and grasped my hand. ‘Save me!’ she cried, ‘I am alone here. I have been alone for days. I am in darkness. When did you come? Where are your companions? Why were you sleeping here? And take me on deck. Is your ship near? If the boat that brought you can live in this sea she can carry me on board your vessel.’

I cannot express the agony of heart in her voice. Her terror at seeing me had been changed into another passion by my naming her.

‘Where’s the captain?’ said I, obliging her to rise, and seating her on the locker beside me.

HEART OF OAK

‘He is drowned,’ she answered.

‘When?’

‘A long time ago. Seven or eight days ago. I have lost the day. I do not know how long I have been alone. Why don’t we go on deck? Is the sea too rough for your boat to leave this wreck?’

‘Why, poor young lady,’ said I, trying to catch a fair view of her face; but it was too dim for that, and then again she was thickly furred about the neck, and her hat, that seemed of velvet without a brim, sat low. ‘I would take you away from this rolling hulk at once if I could. Under God I may yet save you. I am as much shipwrecked as you are. But we needn’t despair. This hull dances tightly; she has been washing about now for some days, and I should doubt by the feel of her jumps if there’s two foot of water in her hold. Who’s that dead woman in the galley?’

‘The captain’s wife,’ she answered, staring at me.

‘ How came she to perish there ? ’]

‘ She went with her husband to help him affix a lantern to the bowsprit. He slipped overboard with the light and was drowned. I waited for them here and went to find them, and saw Mrs. Burke lying on the deck. She had fallen and broken her leg. I was too weak to carry or drag her into this cabin and I pulled her into the galley for the shelter of it, and there she lay, and I could not help her,’ she cried, clasping her hands with strange, piteous, involuntary motions of her head. ‘ I don’t know whether she died of grief, or from the injury of her fall, or whether the cold killed her. It was black in the galley, and I could not see her. I often called her name, but she never answered me. Oh, what an awful time was that night ! I stayed by her until long after I knew she was dead, and then came down here, and have remained in this place ever since—no, three times I have been on deck to look for a ship : it was

always snowing—it has been enough to drive me mad,' said she, passing her hand with a wild gesture across her eyes.

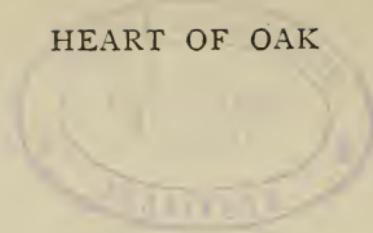
'Mad indeed!' said I to myself, all thought of my own situation vanishing in the presence of the anguish of this poor gentle young woman: she had a sweet soft voice: I supposed she had been alone in this labouring hulk for hard upon a week. It was wonderful she should have kept her mind. Indeed it put a sort of craziness even into *my* seasoned head when I paused in contemplation of her, and realised how it might have been with *me* had I been alone in this straining, creaking, wallowing fabric with no one aboard beside myself but a dead woman, an atmosphere of stinging cold, nigh twenty hours of blackness every day.

'But you've not been starving all this while?' said I.

'When there was daylight,' she answered, 'I'd get some food and wine from yonder;'

she pointed to the pantry. ‘I took a little stock to my cabin. Where is your ship? Have you no companions? Take me on deck to see your boat and the vessel,’ and she extended her hand.

I saw she had not understood me, and I told her how it had come to pass that I was on board the hulk with her. She listened in silence, saying nothing when I spoke of the men who had been lifted aboard the ‘Planter’ out of the ‘Lady Emma’s’ long-boat, frozen to death, and nothing whilst I described what I myself had undergone in the jolly-boat. She seemed slow to understand; but at last, when I was done, after continuing to stare at me, for our faces were a sort of glimmer one to the other in that gloom, she gave a shriek, and crying ‘There is no hope for me, then! there is no hope for me, then!’ buried her face and shook and swayed in a passion of weeping.



CHAPTER XIV

STILLADRIFT

I COULD do nothing but let her cry; yet, knowing there is no better medicine for such misery and fear as hers than action and the sight of it, I got up and went to the pantry for materials to trim and light the lamp. I found oil and bundles of wick, but no matches. I returned and asked the poor weeping young lady to tell me if she knew where I might find a box of matches; she went to a cabin which I supposed was hers, one on the port side, almost aft. I was struck by her walk: not once did she stumble or pause, wild as the play of the plank was. In a few minutes she rejoined me with a box of wax lights, and, unhooking the lamp, I filled

and trimmed it and hung it up, and it swung burning brightly.

Now I could see Miss Otway, and as much of her face as showed was remarkable for delicacy and refinement. She was very pale, her eyes light, whether blue or grey I could not then tell; her hair was of a soft, rather dark amber. She had perfectly even small white teeth, but her lips were pale and marked a want of red blood. She was of medium height, but of a shape not to be guessed at, heaped as her form was with clothes. What she wore was very rich and fine, and a little diamond sparkled in each ear. She seemed fragile, in delicate health, just the sort of girl to whom the doctors, despairing of their physic, would recommend the breezes of the world's oceans.

Her eyes were red with weeping, and when I glanced at her after hanging up the lamp I found her staring at me with looks of anxiety and expectation piteous with passion.

‘This,’ said I, casting up my gaze at the lamp, ‘makes the cabin cheerful. I hope there is plenty of oil aboard to keep us in light till we are taken off.’

‘When will that be?’ she cried.

‘Why, perhaps to-day and perhaps to-morrow,’ said I. ‘My ship can’t be far off; her captain is one of the humanest hearts afloat. He thinks three of you are aboard here, and he’ll cruise for you. If he don’t find us the reason will lie in the weather, not in his not hunting.’ Then, looking towards the stove, I exclaimed, ‘You’ll have been ice cold down in this well. Let’s build a fire, there’s plenty of coal in the hull: the boatswain Wall said so.’

‘Who were the dead?’ she exclaimed.

‘Two seamen and the steward. A fourth—the doctor—lies fearfully frostbitten. He stands to lose his feet and hands.’

‘They wanted to take me with them,’ she cried. ‘Captain Burke would not let me go;

Mrs. Burke was against it: had I gone I might now be safe in your ship.'

'Don't imagine that,' said I, deeply pitying as I looked at her. '*You* capable of enduring two nights of exposure in the seas in that open boat! They proved sound friends who kept you here. *Here* you're alive and you shall be saved—you shall be saved!' I exclaimed heartily.

A faint smile put a look of spirit into her pale face. I went to the stove, and beside it, secured so they should not fetch away, were three or four buckets of coal, but no wood. I was in no temper to rummage the ship for a faggot, and, having noticed a chopper in the pantry, I fetched a bunk-board from the captain's cabin and split it, and presently had a roaring fire.

'Did the crew cook their victuals here before leaving?' said I, noticing a kettle, a frying-pan, and other galley furniture lying near the stove.

She answered that some cooking had been done for the crew in this cabin.

‘Pray sit you here,’ said I, catching her gently by the wrist and bringing her close to the stove, and seating her on a small cleated sofa beside it. ‘I believe a pannikin of hot drink—tea, coffee, or cocoa—and something to eat, will do us both good. Keep you here and thaw through and through whilst I get a kettleful of water.’

She was watching me with some life: the cuddy fire threw a warm, cheerful colour upon her face, and the flames shone in her eyes, filling them as with a dance of courage. When I spoke of fetching some fresh water, she cried out eagerly, extending her arms:

‘Oh! mind you do not slide overboard. The decks are deadly. I can’t be left alone again.’

I smiled and bade her not fear for me, and picking up the kettle and dropping the chopper into my coat pocket—it was an

immensely thick pilot-cloth coat I had found in the captain's cabin and put on—I went on deck.

This was a lead-coloured day with a confusion of ragged black cloud thronging southward where the vapour was crowded and darkening into a look of thunder. I saw no signs of the 'Planter,' nothing but the ice afar. Secretly I had no hope that Captain Parry would persevere in his quest. I made no doubt he would suppose all hands in the jolly-boat had been drowned, which, God knows, was very near the truth; and this would dispirit him, his forecastle working strength would be weakened also, for, saving Wall, the 'Lady Emma's' men were of no use, and I reckoned he would be glad to stick his ship north, clear of the perils of the ice and the blinding snow-storms.

But whether it was because I was a young fellow of a heart naturally lively, or whether because I had escaped a dreadful death, so

that the being on board this hull was almost as a rescue, 'tis true I felt no depression, no despondency in any marked degree when I looked round on stepping on deck and saw the leaden, rolling, frosting ocean bare, and viewed the tumbling, dismasted, mutilated hull, white fore and aft, bright with a hundred figures in ice, a most forlorn and dismal object as she bowed her naked bowsprit into the sallow trough, wearily leaning off the slant, with cataracts of foam hissing from the channels and scaling her sloping side. I could not but reflect that, though we were far south, whalers in plenty were to be met with in these seas, and that the hulk was stout and buoyant, and bade fair to last us our time in her, which might not extend beyond the morrow.

So, with a good heart and a vow besides to do my manhood's best to cheer up my poor companion, to make her as comfortable as the means of the hulk and my sailor's judgment would allow, and to help preserve her life in

God's own time, I looked along the deck, and then seeing how it must be, went to a scuttle-butt lashed forwards of the port gangway, and finding it half full, went to work on it with the chopper, knocked the hoops off, and the staves tumbled to the deck, letting slip a mass of fresh-water ice, shaped cask-wise. I struck off as much as would fill a kettle, leaving the rest to lie, and returned to the cabin.

'Now,' said I, knowing the tonic worth of work in a time like this, 'melt this for us, if you please. When the kettle boils we'll go to breakfast.'

'Is your ship in sight?' said she, getting up and taking the kettle and ice.

'No,' I answered, 'but something will be coming along soon. This is a great whaling ocean, you know.'

'What is your name?' she asked.

'Ralph Selby,' I replied.

'How did you know my name?'

‘ Wall, the boatswain, was full of you and Captain Burke and his wife when he was brought aboard out of the long-boat.’

‘ Yes, yes, I understand,’ said she. ‘ I should have guessed it.’

‘ There are things to be done whilst you get the kettle to boil,’ said I. ‘ You move about very easily, I see.’

‘ I am used to this dreadful monotonous rolling,’ she answered.

‘ Can you lay your hands upon what we may want in the pantry?’

‘ Oh, yes. I know what’s there. Shall I boil some coffee?’

‘ If you please,’ said I, smiling to find her talking with a show of life. ‘ I am going to the captain’s cabin to look to one or two matters,’ and with that I left her.

I entered the berth I had shifted myself in, and which I knew had been the captain’s by its appointments, and first I looked at the chronometers, and, finding them still going,

carefully wound them afresh, guessing by the revolutions of the key that they would have stopped shortly. I then sought for and found the ship's papers, and overhauled them to gather the character of the supplies aboard. The cargo consisted of stout, brandy, and whiskey; samples of preserved potatoes and articles of potted food, a quantity of theatrical scenery, builders' stuff, such as doors and window frames; patent fuel, oil cake, india rubber, and certain other commodities. I observed that amongst the samples was a quantity of preserved milk: there was also a consignment of one hundred iron cases, each containing two hundred and fourteen biscuits, weighing one pound each, and specified as six inches square by one and a half inches thick.

In short the paper indicated half a ship-load of food and liquor. But I made nothing of this then. Such a plenty was not likely to seem of any use to two people who looked to be taken off the wreck in a few days at the

outside, and for whom therefore a single cask of beef, a single barrel of ship's bread, along with the little stock of delicacies I had observed in the pantry, would be more than enough.

I lingered to overhaul the nautical appliances, intending, should a phantom of sun show, to get an observation. It was very gloomy here. I found a small brass clock ticking stoutly, and this I wound up, the plain silver watch in my pocket having stopped when the jolly-boat capsized : the time by the little clock was a quarter after eleven. I went out and set a clock under the skylight to this hour. I guessed it would comfort the girl's eye to see the time. Nothing in such a situation as ours could make one feel more outcast, more hopelessly removed from human reach and sympathy, than a lifeless clock silently telling the same hour always. It would be as though time itself had abandoned one.

The ice was melted and the kettle boiling, and Miss Otway was making a potful of coffee. She had lifted the fiddles and spread a cloth, and put some preserved meat, cheese, jam, biscuit, and the like upon the table. The lamp and the flames in the grate made a light like noon, and, now looking round, I beheld a very rosy interior, a quantity of books, mirrors for decoration, comfortable armchairs and couches, and sundry fal-lals ; all designed, no doubt, to render the voyage of Miss Otway cheerful and pleasant.

Turning, she cried out : ‘ Oh, Mr. Selby, you cannot imagine what it is to see someone —to have someone to speak to. Only God could say how lonely I have felt. The dreadfully long nights ; the endless hours of darkness——’ Her voice broke and her head drooped.

‘ No need to tell me what you have undergone,’ said I. ‘ Never in all sea story did any girl suffer upon the ocean as you have. But you’ve a brave look. You’ll

keep up your tears now. I'm a sailor and I give you my word we are very well off. We need but patience, and faith in that God who has watched over us both.'

On this she raised her head and viewed me a little while steadily, as one who stares critically to make sure of another.

I took the pot of coffee from her and we seated ourselves. She had suffered so long from what I may truly call a very anguish of loneliness—and, indeed, one had need to be locked up in that same rolling hull, in the blackness and the cold, with the seas roaring outside, and within always the same soul-maddening noise of creaking bulkheads and harshly strained fastenings, to realise what this poor, gentle, delicate lady had endured—that I was sure she'd find a wonderful ease in talking freely. I therefore questioned her whilst we sat eating, and she told me who she was, where she lived, how the wife of the master of the vessel had been her old

nurse, with other matters which she herself relates.

She warmed up in talking. I think she found a sort of hope in merely speaking of her father and her home and the gentleman, Mr. Archibald Moore, to whom, but for her health, so she told me, she would have been married some months before the date of her sailing. I so questioned her that the early despair in her manner died out when she talked of her father and sweetheart. I took care to converse as though they were within reach, and the meeting a matter of a little waiting only. In short, my resolution to cheer her mastered her fears and perhaps her convictions ; and even whilst we sat I beheld a new life stealing into her, speaking in her raised, hopeful, more eager voice, and softening the haggard, wild look in her eyes.

Presently she put some question which I had to fence with.

‘ My dread,’ she said, ‘ all the while I was

alone here, was ice ; the ship lies helpless ; I never knew but that an iceberg was close to, and that every next hurl of the sea would dash the wreck against some frozen cliff. Is there any ice in sight ?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'but a good way off.'

'Suppose we drift towards an iceberg, what shall we do ?'

'No good in *supposing* at sea,' I said. 'Time enough to deal with a difficulty when it's within hail.'

'Does the hull remain in one place ? Or are we being driven by the seas and the wind ?'

'If the sun will put his nose out,' said I, with a glance at the thickly snow-coated skylight, 'I'll find out where we are.'

'Do you understand navigation ?'

I replied with a grave nod.

'If we are moving at all, which way are we driving, do you think ?'

'The sextant will tell us,' said I.

Thus she plied me, straining her poor eyes with consuming anxiety. I answered warily but always on the side of hope.

When I was going on deck she wanted to accompany me, but I bade her stop where she was till I had stretched some lifelines along. When I looked out I saw there was no chance of obtaining an observation. The sky was near, and thick with rolling clouds : the windy dusk had shrunk the sea-girdle, and the distant ice was out of sight : the leaden surge broke in against the snow-soft gloom. No more desolate ocean-picture had I ever viewed ; its spirit sank into me in a depression that brought me to an idle halt for some minutes whilst I wrestled with myself. I started, and my very soul shrank within me when I asked myself : If we are not fallen in with what is to become of us ? Where are we drifting ? Then I plucked up with the reflection that we were in navigated seas ; any moment might give me the sight of a

sail ; and my immediate business therefore was to render our distress a visible thing upon the face of the rolling waters.

I shut the companion doors that the girl might be warm below, and, that I might move with security, went to work to stretch lines along the deck. A great plenty of gear lay frozen all about ; I got hold of an end and worked a length into some sort of suppleness, and with much hard labour succeeded in setting up life-lines in short scoops, so as to bring them taut, for the winch and capstan were frozen motionless, and I could do nothing with them.

This business carried me abreast of the galley, where I saw with a sudden recoil once again the body of the captain's wife. She seemed asleep, so fresh, living and breathing she looked, with even a sort of colour in her face, and the expression of her mouth easy and placid. But since she was dead it was fit she should be buried, and as her presence

added to the ghastliness of this picture of wreck, and weighed like an assurance of doom upon the spirits, I resolved to turn her over the side without ado ; so, with averted face—for I could not bear to look upon her, she lay so life-like : it was like drowning rather than burying her—I took the body under the arms, and with all reverence gently dragged it to a great gap of smashed bulwark, when, just whispering, ‘May God receive you, poor woman, and may He have mercy upon those who are left,’ I slid her overboard, and instantly quitted the side, not choosing to get a memory of her as she lay floating ere the drenched clothes sucked her under.

Constantly I cast my eyes into the north for a sight of the sun ; but he never showed himself. There stood about twelve foot of splintered foremast. I meant to fly a flag by day and hoist a lighted lantern by night ; but how to shin up so as to secure a block at the head ?

I mused a bit, and then went in search of the carpenter's chest, which I found in the forecastle. It was a huge chest, cleated and lashed down against the bulk-head that divided the men's sea-parlour from the hold, and it lay in such gloom that I could make nothing of it, so I returned to the cabin for a lantern. I found a couple of bull's-eye lamps in the pantry. Whilst I filled and trimmed one of them, Miss Otway came from the stove to the door and stood looking in.

'Can't I help you?' said she.

'No,' said I.

'What are you going to do?'

'I am going to hoist a distress signal.'

'Is there anything in sight?' she shrieked.
I shook my head.

'Why won't you let me help you?' said she. 'It's horrible to be left alone down here. Make me of use. It will do me good to help you.'

But I would not allow her to come on

deck merely to look on and be frozen to the marrow by the pouring wind ; so, cheerily saying I'd find her employment by-and-by, I carried the lighted bull's-eye on deck and made my way to the forecastle, holding by the life-lines, so that I moved as briskly as if the hull lay quiet.

I quickly found what I immediately wanted, namely, a quantity of long iron spikes. I took a handful of these and a hammer on deck and drove a spike deep into the wood, a little above the other ; and thus I made a ladder of spikes, every projection of iron yielding me room for my ~~foot~~^{pot} and for a grip of one hand. When I had driven in the spikes as high as was needful, I came down, and after hunting over the gear upon the deck found a small block through which I rove a line that looked like a length of the fore-royal signal halliards. I climbed the mast again with this block and line and, driving a spike into the head of the stump, I secured the block

to it and descended for good, this business being finished.

I had taken notice of a flag locker under a grating abaft the wheel ; I went to it and found a complete code of Marryatt's signals, a large and small ensign, and a jack. There was too much bunting in the big ensign for such weather as this, and for such winds as might burst upon us at any moment : so I bent on the small ensign to my halliards and ran it, jack downwards, to the head of the stump of foremast, where it flared bravely, chattering like a thing of life.

Yet I found it but a mocking signal after all, when I sent my glance from it round the thick swollen and breaking seas, and noticed that even already the dye of the early night seemed in the air, and that in little more than an hour that streaming, flame-like appeal would, as a call to the eye, be as useless as the stump it blew from.

I was now extremely anxious to ascertain

the depth of water in the hold, and went to the pumps to see what was to be done with the ice there. The sounding tube was perhaps solid with ice half-way to the hold ; I thought then I would try and draw one of the pumps, and having the pantry chopper in my hand, let fly, bruising and splintering so as to free the bucket. In the midst of my chopping Miss Otway called out. I stopped and saw her head in the companion way.

‘ Oh,’ she cried, with a note in her voice that sounded almost like joy, pointing with a gesture of rapture to the inverted ensign, ‘ that will bring help to us ! That will be seen for miles and miles. How clever ! How did you manage to climb that slippery mast ? ’ And then, catching sight of the spikes, she exclaimed, ‘ I see. I see. It’s wonderfully done.’

‘ It’s too cold for you on deck,’ said I, scarcely keeping grave over this girlish praise. ‘ Remain below in the warmth. No use taking

a voyage for your health only to lose your toes and fingers as your doctor has.'

But paying no heed to this, she stepped out of the companion way, and putting her thickly-gloved hand upon one of the life-lines, came to where I was letting fly at the pump and watched me.

It was the best light I had yet viewed her in ; and now indeed I perceived that she was a very delicate, sweet-looking young lady, about two-and-twenty years of age, pale, but of a transparency of complexion that made a beauty of her pallor ; nor were her eyes wanting in expression, though they would be too light to faithfully reflect the deeper and subtler passions and sensations of her spirit.

I thought her the most refined-looking lady I had ever seen ; which perhaps is not saying much, seeing how many of my years had been passed upon the ocean. I saw the quality and breeding of her in her face and

heard it in her voice, and I think anyone, no matter how inexperienced in such things, but would, on looking at her, have said to himself, this is an English lady.

After chopping and hammering for some time, I freed the bucket and drew the pump ; and, the sounding-rod lying handily by, I dropped it, and after several casts, so hard did I find it to get the level of the water betwixt the swift abrupt rolls of the hull, I made a little more than a foot and a half. I was astonished, but wonderfully heartened. Here was a hull that had not been pumped out for eight or ten days : she had been straining heavily in the hollow hour after hour : and yet there was no more water in her than a single spell of a watch on deck at the pumps might free her of !

I refitted the pump and fell to work at the brake and brought up some water.

‘ Let me help you,’ said Miss Otway.

‘ It won’t hurt you,’ said I, and brought a

coil of rope across the deck for her to stand on, that her feet might be clear of the water as it washed with the slant of the planks. We then went to work: the water bubbled, the clank of the brake ran a noise of life through the hulk; the exercise flushed the girl's face, and, in a pause for breath, I told her it would do her more good than sitting by the fire.

In that same pause whilst she breathed quickly she glanced with a sudden look of pain and consternation in the direction of the galley, and exclaimed :

‘The body of my poor old nurse lies there. I had forgotten her.’

‘I buried her,’ said I.

‘Where?’

I told her. She was shocked and her eyes filled, and she turned her head to hide her face.

‘It was not a thing to keep,’ said I.

‘Oh no,’ she cried, looking round at me,

eagerly and yet piteously. ‘I don’t mean that. You threw her into the sea as she lay —without a prayer—’

‘No,’ said I, shortly.

She viewed me a little gratefully. I grasped the brake: she put her hand upon it, and we fell to afresh.

We worked in this fashion for above half an hour, and then Miss Otway, glowing with the labour and in no wise distressed by it, saving that her breathing was quick, went below. I fetched the telescope and stayed to carefully search the horizon before it fell dark. But point the tubes as I would they gave me nothing. The near sea-line tumbled dimly in long ragged wings of dark vapour, which as they lifted with the wind stretched overhead like lengths of smoke; and betwixt them I spied a higher platform of cloud, mouse-coloured here and there as though touched by some wild stormy light. I saw no ice, but the wind blew as though ice were

close aboard : the sting of it was insufferable when you faced it standing. A noise of rattling sometimes came from the forecastle as though the spray froze in leaping, and fell with the weight of hail in the tropics, and already the pump we had been plying was as thick and hard bound as the other.

And still I lingered, not indeed with the hope of sighting a sail before the blackness fell upon us, but with the idea of making some sort of blind guess at the drift of the hull. The strong breeze blew out of the north, and the tall coils of sea ran in wide flashings from that quarter, but the large ocean swell was about north-west. I was not very well acquainted with these waters and scarcely knew what to recollect of the currents hereabouts. I was aware that the set of the ice was to the northwards. But then the bergs struck deep root into motions of the sea which had no influence atop ; so that there might be very well a surface-trend to the southward through

wind and surge and swell, when, some fathoms under, the body of the water was slowly streaming in another direction.

A dismal picture with the sadness of despair coming into me out of it, when I looked at that square of bunting flaming in mute appeal from the stump-head to the blind horizon ! But we had life, and so there must be hope, and rallying my spirits with a will, I strode the length of the life-line to the halliards, hauled the flag down, and went to the cabin to find and trim a lantern to hoist in its place.

CHAPTER XV

THE ICE IN THE SOUTH

I LEFT a light burning brightly at the mast-head : the wild meteoric dance of that gleam was a sort of hope : no ship sighting it but would guess from the rapidity of its oscillations that it danced on an open boat, or shone from some short height upon a dismasted hull.

The wind was freshening with a long deep moan in the rush of it through the flying dusk when I left the deck : but I gathered from a general atmospheric hardening all round, a firmer line in the curl of the surge, a distincter flash in the foam of it, that it was to be a clear night, with perhaps a star or two by-and-by. The hull made good play : she was like a live thing ; and no helm and no fragment of

canvas vexing her, she took up her own position and wallowed dryly, save that now and again in a sharp pitch she'd meet some lateral run of sea and whiten in the air forward into the look of a snow-storm: but the froth mostly blew clear, and the water when it came streaming aft quickly froze into the snow.

Miss Otway sat beside the stove: she had removed her hat, otherwise was wrapped up to the throat in furs; her yellow hair was shot with amber light when the swing of the lamp flashed the radiance upon it, but her looks were white, and something wild with grief, anxiety and fear. She asked me if there was any ice in sight.

'None that I can see in the dusk,' I answered.

'I'm all the while dreading the ice,' said she. 'I should not fear this high sea and our lying dismasted in it, if it were not for the ice.'

'There's none near to hurt us just now,' said I.

‘When I first came into this cabin,’ she exclaimed, ‘in the Thames, a chill ran through me that was cold as ice itself. It was warm, and yet I shivered as though freezing. Was it an omen? The memory has been haunting me in my time of loneliness here. A little while before we were dismasted we sighted a huge iceberg that was like a cathedral: it had a beach of frozen foam, and the snow whirled in white dust on one side of it against the dark clouds. Oh, Mr. Selby,’ she cried, ‘think of this helpless hull striking against such a mountain of ice as that, and our getting upon it and perishing with the cold—the awful cold!’

‘Why, Miss Otway,’ said I with a bustle of voice and manner as I got up to set the kettle on the stove. ‘This sort of talk is good for neither of us. Do you believe in omens? But don’t be scared till danger’s come, and not then. There’s plenty to eat and drink in this ship and I’m for faring heartily for the

sake of hoping heartily, and working heartily, should work be wanted. Come, you shall fry some ham ; it's my turn to prepare the table.'

Presently we were seated as before. I talked more reassuringly than I had ventured on earlier, for now that her hat was off I saw her face very clearly, how refined she was, how gentle, how well nurtured ; my very heart pitied her : I felt as though commanded by God Himself to take charge of her, to watch over her, to keep her heart up ; I can't express indeed how she appealed to me out of her gentleness and refinement, the horrible situation she was in, the unspeakably dreadful time she had passed through alone.

And often I would catch her in the intervals of our speech eyeing me under drooping lids with an eager searching look of enquiry, as though she would comfort her poor little self by finding out what sort of a man was I who had come into this rolling hull where she was alone ? I wished her to find

out quickly that she might be easy ; but we both needed time, I to act and she to discover.

I cleared the table and went on deck. The lantern burned brightly. The night lay black, but the atmosphere was hard as when I had gone into the cabin, and you found a distance in the gloom. All was as well with the hull as one could dare hope for, and, closing the companion doors, I re-entered the cabin.

It was about six o'clock then. I lighted a bull's-eye and went into the captain's berth for the log-book which I had noticed upon the table, and to overhaul a bag of charts. I brought the log-book and the chart I wanted to the cabin table : Miss Otway seeing me at this, came opposite and stood there looking on. I wished to see the last entry in the log-book ; which done, I opened the chart, and was startled to observe that, supposing the drift of the vessel to have been continuously to the southward, as somehow I imagined it was, that

group of islands called the South Orkneys, stretching some sixty-five miles east and west, could not be farther than twenty-five or thirty leagues.

‘Are you finding out where we are?’ said Miss Otway.

‘I shall know exactly when I get an observation,’ said I, and carried the log-book and chart back into the captain’s cabin.

But I confess my heart was sunk. To be sure, throughout I had vaguely known our place—could have named it within fifty or eighty miles perhaps—yet the business I had been about ever since I woke up stopped me from realising till I looked on the chart, when of course I understood that if our drift was south we stood to go to pieces upon land that would be the most God-forsaken on the wide face of the oceans of the globe, if it were not that, hard by them, covering a range of eight or nine degrees of longitude, lay groups of rocks with a range of mountainous continent

stretching due south (magnetic) even more desolate, naked and iron-sheathed.

But we were not ashore yet: nor could I know certainly that our drift was south; and then there was to-morrow's daylight with its hope of succour.

I sat beside the stove and talked with Miss Otway. She spoke of the voyage and of the apparition which had haunted the memory and depressed the spirits of Captain Burke down to the hour of his death. I sought to amuse her by relating certain experiences of my own; and she forgot her situation whilst listening to some of my yarns. The truth is I had gone to sea at the age of thirteen and had followed the life fourteen years, during which I had served in several capacities in many kinds of vessels, though my experiences lay chiefly in the India and China trade. I had plenty then to talk about: it amused me to yarn, and she listened with more life and intelligence than I should have expected in

one with so fixed an expression of dismay, of hearkening consternation and mourning.

After satisfying myself with a look around on deck, I returned, and going to the book-shelves, read the names of some of the volumes. It was a good collection of books: the best of the poets and novelists were there, with odds and ends of scrappy reading like Hone's and D'Israeli's. Here I found dear old '*Peter Simple*,' and carrying the tale to the stove, I read bits aloud, and once or twice she laughed. Then something suggesting the topic, I got telling her about shipwrecks, my notion being to let her understand how much better off were we than others who had suffered from disasters at sea. I talked of the raft of the '*Medusa*,' described that pathetic, lamentable scene in the round-house of the '*Abergavenny*' —the wax-lights, the captain clasping his daughters to him—related the loss of the '*Amphitrite*,' as told to me by a man I had sailed with who had been one of the survivors.

of that most tragic of shipwrecks, which littered the Boulogne sands with scores of bodies of handsome, finely built young women.

‘Are there instances of people,’ she asked, ‘who have been wrecked upon icebergs and survived?’

I spun her a few yarns of polar experiences in this way: of Russian seamen found floating on ice: of a whaler half full of men stranded on a berg and floating in her giant cradle down into open waters where she was boarded and the people taken out of her.

‘How long had they been locked up?’

‘Several months.’

‘Were their sufferings great?’

Not knowing, I had to invent, and to cheer her, said: ‘Oh, no. They kept up good fires, had plenty of beef and tobacco, heartened themselves by singing songs, telling stories, playing at games of their own invention, and fashioning ornaments out of whale ivory. It came right with them. When

things come right it's the same as if they never were wrong. Nothing counts but the loss of time whilst you're waiting for the settlement. How soon, when you get well, you forget that you were ill! How quickly you forget the weather! Who's it says it's always too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry, but that God so contrives it, at the end of the year it's all the same? Keep up your heart, Miss Otway, and reflect that when this is ended and you're safe ashore with your people it'll be no more than an experience to talk about.'

'Yes,' said she, with a faint smile, 'it will be all right when I *am* ashore; but who's that other person who says, philosophy triumphs over past and future ills, but present ills triumph over philosophy?'

This passed my plain understanding, and I let the subject go.

I went on deck for more ice to melt and boil, and found it blowing pretty strong. A

high sea, ridged in lines of ebony against the light of their own foam, and melted in roaring snowdrifts under the hull that was topping them with a wonderful buoyancy. I looked for a star, but all was sweeping blackness aloft, save the point of light at the stump-head.

Knowing this hard heave of sea must certainly give us a steady trend southward, helped as the hull was by the blast every time she soared into the icy howl of it, I fetched a bull's-eye, and observing by the binnacle that the hulk's head pointed about east by north, I went to the starboard rail and overlay it, staring with desperate searching eyes into the hard gloom till I was almost frozen. But I could see nothing that looked like ice, no faintness, no spectral sheen, all that glared was foam running from the arched back of the surge ; so I went below, where I boiled some coffee, and, shortly after eight, Miss Otway withdrew to her berth.

I took the bull's-eye to find me more clothes in the captain's cabin, and when I was wrapped up to the bigness of a Greenland's-man, I returned to the stove, dimming the lamp to a light that was just enough to see by, and lay down upon a couch. Presently I was startled out of a reverie by seeing a great rat come close to the fire, as though for the warmth. Very quietly putting my hand in my pocket, I pulled out my clasp knife, which I opened ; the blade was dagger-shaped. Then, quick as lightning, I lanced the weapon at the beast and half severed its head. This pleased me, for in the course of our talks Miss Otway had said that in her time of loneliness, a huge rat had come into the cabin and looked at her till she was motionless with disgust and fear. I could not know, however, that this was the rat that had so served her ; though it made one less aboard, and I dropped it into a coal-bucket to chuck over the side next day.

The sight of the bleeding, lifeless beast set my thoughts running on the hours the girl, whilst alone, had spent in this hull, and I wondered when I looked at the rat and listened to the shrieking and grinding noises, that she had not days before gone off her head. I guessed that her mind had been cast in a heroic mould ; never else could she have come through such a term of loneliness with her wits all right. Less had driven strong men overboard, gaping madmen.

Whilst I sat following the wild and flying motions of the hull, testing them by sensation to gather if the buoyancy diminished, I was addressed. I looked round with a sudden surprise that was nearly fright : it was Miss Otway, furred and clothed from head to foot as she had left me.

‘Are you going to sit up all night ?’ she exclaimed.

‘I’m going to sit here,’ I answered. ‘I shall snooze at intervals.’

'Let me watch whilst you sleep,' said she.

'There's nothing to watch,' I answered,
'nothing to keep a look-out for.'

'A ship might see our lantern and come down to us.'

'She could do nothing in this weather.'

'But to think of being asleep whilst a vessel is coming down to see what the light means! Think of her hailing, getting no answer and passing on. It might be our only chance.'

I told her that might happen even though we both kept watch all night in the cabin. How, down here, should we hear a hail from the water? We'd need to keep a look-out on deck, which would kill her quickly and me soon after.

'Pray go and rest,' said I, 'and trust me to see anything that may come along and to hear anything that may hail.'

She looked reluctant, very white, her eyes dim and large with tragic expectancy as

though she never knew but that in the next minute something frightful would happen.

I picked the rat up by the tail. ‘Is this your friend?’ said I.

She shrieked, believing it alive; then, shuddering and shuddering, staggered somewhat blindly in the direction of the cabin.

I jumped up and supported her, encouraging her by every promise and hope my brain could frame.

‘You have not slept for nights,’ said I, pausing at her door. ‘Rest now that I am here, if only that you may have strength enough to leave the hull and health enough to carry you to your home.’

She had removed her gloves: I grasped her ice-cold hand and returned to my couch.

The night crept away. I dozed at intervals, visiting the deck perhaps half a dozen times. In the morning watch I slept soundly upon the couch by the stove, and when I awoke it was nine by the clock under the sky-

light, still black as thunder, and the hull rolling heavily. I was cold to the heart, and before quitting the cabin kindled a fire to boil some water for a hot drink, then went up the steps to take a look.

It was still blowing fresh, but the wind had shifted north-west, and the sky was a clear, sparkling heaven of stars from sea-line to sea-line, the sea running in steady hills of ink to where you saw the horizon throbbing close under the pale lights of the night low down, so clear was the gale. The mast-head lamp burned dimly ; but it would be day-break shortly. I stared around the sea, and saw nothing north and west and east, but my sight going south was arrested by a low, irregular, dim line : it rose with the heave of the hull, and it was as far off as the horizon. It looked like the sheen of a long face of coast covered with snow : it was a mere attenuated film of faintness stretched where sky and water met, and I looked and looked, believing

it a bank of cloud that would dissolve whilst I watched ; but it hung steady, and still it was so elusive that sometimes I saw it, and when the hull sprang from the trough again it was gone ; and yet again, when she roared to the height of a surge, it was there.

Well, daylight was at hand to resolve it. For my part I had no doubt it was ice ; indeed it had astonished me to find these seas so open at this time of the year ; only, if that sheen out in the morning darkness under the stars was ice, the drift had been ours to carry us to a sight of it : which signified a slide of keel running into knots : for that steamlike hovering down there had not been in sight two or three hours earlier, when my eye, as now, followed the hard curls of sea working into distance, though the sky was not starry.

I went below, trimmed the lamp, and prepared the table for breakfast. Whilst I was thus occupied, Miss Otway appeared.

She came straight to the stove and held her hands to the blaze, and asked me when it would be daylight. I answered, ‘Within an hour.’

‘This almost perpetual darkness,’ she exclaimed, ‘is one of the most awful parts of this dreadful time.’

‘I hope you slept well?’

‘Yes, I slept soundly, and awoke only about a quarter of an hour ago. What is the time?’ I named the hour. ‘You’ve seen no signs of a ship during the night, I fear?’

‘Nothing. It has blown hard. It still blows a fresh breeze of wind. This is the most seawardly vessel that was ever launched. It is lucky for us her cargo is a light one. Think of her laden to her chain-plate bolts with some dead weight of iron goods. She would have been under water day and night, and by this time have ceased to be a hull.’

‘When were you last on deck, Mr. Selby?’

‘I’m just now from the deck.’

‘Is there anything in sight?’

‘I’m waiting for daybreak to make sure.’

My answer caused her to make a step from the stove, and to advance her white face whilst she stared at me.

‘Is there ice near us?’ she asked.

‘I find an appearance in the southward that may prove ice,’ said I. ‘But what else are you to expect in these seas?’ I added carelessly. ‘Here we are somewhere down in sixty degrees, and, since I have been aboard, the horizon has been almost clear. What shall we have for breakfast? Will you boil some coffee whilst I search the pantry? Suppose daylight should reveal ice—it may also show us a whaler fishing in the thick of the bergs!’

And assuming a cheerful, bustling manner I lighted a bull’s-eye, whistling some sea tune the while, and went into the pantry, where, after a brief overhaul of the closet and shelves,

I laid hands upon a tin of herrings, sardines, and some kind of delicate sausage.

'I am making free,' said I, putting the stuff upon the table.

'These things were laid in for you. I'll take an inventory of what's left by-and-by; I allow that everything for cabin use will be stowed in the lazarette. When you're transhipped the delicacies must go along with you. The whaleman's our chance, and his cupboard has no reputation for dainties.'

I waited for her to sit, attended upon her, then fell to myself. But all the while we remained seated she was straining her eyes at the porthole facing her, then turning to the porthole behind her as though she thought through the gleaming ebony of the glass, white with the foam it rose from, to behold the ice I had spoken about.

Day broke before I had breakfasted; it lay white in the snow on the skylight ere I rose, and the grey of it in the cabin windows

was growing blue when I went on deck accompanied by Miss Otway. And now I looked at what, for the hour past, I had dreaded to see. The day had dawned in cold splendour ; the sun was flashing in rose, at this moment perhaps two degrees above the horizon ; a number of small clouds were floating near his face and looked like bits of gilt scaling off the rayless target-like luminary ; otherwise the heavens sloped clear in a sheer vault of deeply dark blue, under which ran the sea of the rich hue of the sky, but full of gleams and the snow of melting crests, and here and there spaces of an exquisite ice-like green snaking currentwise over the heaving waters.

It no longer blew hard, but it was still a fresh breeze, spray-clouded in the frequent guns of it that shrieked in gusts over the bulwarks to the loftier lifts of the hull. But what my sight went to and remained fastened upon whilst, I own, my breath came and went

quickly with the surprise of the magnificent, but to us the terrible, sight, was the scene of the southern quarter of the sea. There, stretching for miles and miles, was ice in bergs which to the naked sight looked to lie so close, the picture was that of a compacted coast of alabaster, broken with pinnacles and acclivities of a thousand shapes, curving in places as though in bays, the whole on either hand dying out in films of white, whilst over the bows and over the stern, too, every time we rose to the height of a sea I saw ice, plentiful as the breasts of the canvas of a vast fleet ; and through the southern sky low down ran a long glinting line or gleam as though a continent of ice was reflected in its face ; it was like the pearly radiance that hovers just off the edges of sails when lightly swelling in the tropics against a soft blue sky.

I glanced at Miss Otway : she was staring at the sight with large nostrils and a gaze of terror under the little frown that the

strain of her gaze had knitted her brows into.

‘That is ice,’ she cried.

‘Ay, miles of it’ said I. ‘But is there nothing good for us amidst that prodigious huddle of sail-like stuff?’

I took the telescope out of the companion and knelt with it to steady the tubes, and slowly and carefully swept the whole of that wonderful range, from film to film blue in the air. The sun’s rosy light was full upon it; only the brush of an artist could show you what I saw as the surge ran me into a clear view of the horizon. It looked like a hundred cities of marble and alabaster, all of them going to pieces. It was no compact coast. There were many wide gaps, titanic streets fit for the tread of such ocean giant-spirits as would inhabit those colossal structures of crystal. The nearest point seemed about ten miles distant. All was clear sea between, and northwards I saw no ice.

Miss Otway stood beside me holding by a belaying pin in the rail. Again and again she would say :

' Do you see any signs of a ship ? Is not that the canvas of a ship—*there*, just where your telescope now points ? '

I saw no ship, but I looked with impassioned intentness till my eyeball seemed to melt dim through the lens under the brass it was pressed against, conceiving that in so vast an arm of ice some vessel might lie embayed.

CHAPTER XVI

THE AURORA AUSTRALIS

WHILST slowly sweeping the ice with the glass, I saw, or seemed to see, when the lenses pointed a little to the eastward of south, a blue shadow of land in the air. I took my eye away from the telescope and then the shadow was gone: I looked again through the glass and there it was, a dim, scarcely distinguishable liquid dye whitening as it climbed till it melted in the azure.

I very well knew that shadow must be land, probably one of the mountainous rocks of the South Orkneys; unless indeed it was that group which lies north-east of the South Shetlands—forming one of them, in short: but I could not persuade myself that our drift to

the westwards had been so considerable. I said to Miss Otway :

‘Do you see a shadow in the air yonder?’

She looked, preserving the frown of an intense stare, and replied :

‘No ; I see no shadow.’

I directed the glass ; she put her eye to it and cried quickly, ‘Yes ; I see it.’

‘It is land,’ said I.

She looked eagerly at me and said, ‘Inhabited land?’

‘I’ll not say so, but I believe they go sealing there. I’ve heard of whalers heaving-to and sending ashore.’

‘For what?’

‘I don’t know.’

I put away the glass and said :

‘I’ve been afraid of that land ; but when I think of it, best after all for us, Miss Otway, it should be there. Only, how to come at it? What’s our drift and where are we? Shall we wash perhaps round yonder point of film,

clearing the whole blocking mass, to light, may be, upon some spouter crawling northwards from ten degrees lower south? Or—or—’ But I broke off, for what was the good of conjecturing unless I could say something to bring a little of the poor girl’s heart into her eyes?

On the chance of something lying hidden round a point of crystal I went forward, lowered the lantern, and ran the red flag aloft, jack down. This done, I fetched a sextant from the captain’s cabin and stood with Miss Otway in the shelter of the companion-way waiting for the sun to cross his meridian, meanwhile searching the line of the ice, beholding the phantasy of a ship’s white sails over and over again, and conversing with the girl.

The sea came ridging steadily out of northwest, the vast westerly swell of the mighty Southern Ocean pulsing through it in rounds so majestically regular, you didn’t notice the heave of it. I had never beheld a more

glorious breast of ocean. All was dark blue sparkling billows, heads of froth tossing into silken veils upon the wind, a roaring, flashing scene, deep blue above, looking in its silence down, and the ice southward, like a coast cut in ivory white, motionless, shining, coming and going as the hull sank and soared.

I got an observation and eagerly went below to work it out. Miss Otway followed me into the captain's cabin and watched me whilst I calculated. I made the latitude sixty degrees ten minutes south, and the longitude exactly forty-five degrees west. Then, looking at the chart, I judged that that shadow of land which was showing miles past the barrier of ice was some central mountain of Coronation Island, towering high four thousand five hundred feet. I marked the hull's place on the chart, and said :

‘ This is where we are.’

She peered, and after a pause exclaimed : ‘ It is all desolation down here ! Look how

far we are off from Cape Horn. There is no nearer civilisation than the Falkland Islands—how many hundreds of miles distant! Oh!' she cried, lifting her head and clapping her hand to her face, 'if we could but hoist even a little sail to save us from drifting to the ice and certain death.'

'No,' I exclaimed, 'death's not aboard yet, not even in sight. Sixty degrees south! The whalers make nothing of that. The Great Circle carries you lower;' but I would not add 'not here.'

Then, my eye going to a bookshelf, I spied a volume which I pulled down quickly. It was a directory to these seas. I searched the pages, and, putting my finger upon a paragraph, said :

'See here now, Miss Otway: men have visited this land, they have named it, surveyed it, sounded round about it, described it. Where one has been others may venture. Look at this,' and I read : ‘“At daylight on

the morning of the 12th January 1823, we saw some pigeons and at six o'clock perceived the east end of the islands of South Orkneys bearing W. by S. distant about eleven leagues. We carried all possible sail to get under the land, but the wind soon became light and left us almost at the mercy of a heavy swell in the midst of ice islands, which made our navigation truly hazardous.”

‘Their ship had masts and sails,’ she exclaimed, ‘and was under command.’

I read on, eager to learn all the book could tell me.

“Being now close under the land I sent a boat from each vessel to explore them. We continued to tack the vessels about in a bay. The icebergs which form in the bays in winter and break away in the summer now produced so much drift ice that we had frequently to tack ship to avoid striking it.”

‘That’s it!’ she cried. ‘Their ship was under command.’

I proceeded : ““ This coast is, if possible, more terrific in appearance than the South Shetland. The tops of the islands for the most part terminate in craggy towering peaks, and look not unlike the mountain tops of a sunken island. The loftiest of these summits, towering up to a point, I denominated Noble’s Peak. This peak in a clear day may be seen at the distance of fifteen leagues.””

‘ Is that the shadow ? ’ she asked.

‘ Possibly.’

‘ Oh ! look at the book, Mr. Selby, and see if it says that the island’s inhabited.’

‘ It’s not inhabited,’ I answered.

Then I stood with my finger upon the page musing upon the brief account. There was little to interest outside of what I had read aloud : the rest told of bearings and distances, and what had been brought up by the lead.

‘ But,’ said I, looking at the girl, ‘ we are

not stranded yet. That we've drifted south is sure; but how much westing has there been in this tumbling drive? Here's all about the currents shown here,' and I turned the leaves of the book and read:

' "Ten miles south of Cape Horn the ocean stream flows east-north-east, half to one mile in the hour." That should be good for us. Let this wind shift south or west, and the swell and the run of the sea will drive the hulk out of sight of the barrier.'

But I had something more to do just then than talk, basing chat on small hope and weak conjecture. I saw to the fire in the stove, then went on deck to sound the well; the pump was hard frozen as before. I freed it and got a cast, and found that no water had drained in since I last sounded. I'll not swear to an inch or two, but the depth was quite unimportant, and after readjusting the pump I took the glass for another long look at the ice.

It was land, sure enough, at the back of the barrier ; the pearly blue shadow stood a clear shape in the lens, and I seemed to see it now with my bare sight when I looked a little away to right or left of it. I carefully took its bearings, also the bearings of certain defined features of what I call the barrier, though, as I have said, it was a length of dislocated stuff full of yawns and wide winding openings, with a menace of the revelation of many grotesque mighty shapes, startling miracles of form beyond the reach of the dreams of fever, should we be set close. There was a sort of salt sparkle upon the range in some places ; and now, whilst looking over the side, I saw, streaming up the slant of a surge, a pistol-shot distant, a mass of the giant kelp of these waters : but I observed no birds, nothing more than that kelp to hint at the meaning of that distant shadow in the air.

It was miserable that I could not get the

least idea of our drift save by waiting and watching, which presently became a sort of anguish. I sought, but could nowhere find, the deep-sea lead, or certainly I should have dropped it over the side, taking my chance of its finding bottom, and lying there to show by the angle of the line into what quarter of the sea we were drifting—whether we were making straight for the heart of the range, as it looked, or laterally rolling towards the south-western extremity of the ice.

The weather continued of a clear cold splendour, the horizon sharp-edged against the sky as the rim of a tumbler. The sea ran hard in spiteful foaming slopes which kept on shouldering the hulk dead to leeward, and within an hour the growth of the ice told me we were closing it; in fact, by the bearings I had taken I saw that the drive of the hull was as fair for the heart of the barrier as if she was being steered for it!

What was to be done? I had been cast in my time in many situations of peril, yet had never known myself despairful even in the blackest hour of my troubles: but I own my heart fell now, my spirits sank, hope died when I looked at those leagues of horizon of ice and reflected upon my helplessness. Could I have summoned the help of but another pair of hands I might have made some desperate effort with capstan and leading-blocks to cap the stump of the foremast with another height of spar, and get a jib stretched that her head might pay off and bring her under some sort of control to enable me to thread the waterways betwixt the bergs. But, single-handed, I could do nothing. There was no height of foremast for the setting of any sort of rag that would round her head away and keep her before it—I mean, in a fashion to hold her responsive to the helm.

When I made the discovery that the hull

was setting dead on to the ice, Miss Otway was in the cabin boiling some cocoa for a scrambling afternoon meal ; she came up while I stood swaying on the heave of the plank, my arms tightly folded, my eyes rooted to the ice ; instantly it was as clear to her as to me whither our drift was tending, and she uttered a low cry as though she had been struck.

The mere sight of her, however, did me good—it quickened perception of my obligations as a man. Her face was white as the foam over the side ; her pale lips moved, but the shrill wind sheared with icy-edge through her words as they came to her lips. She sent a blind, staggering glance round the western and northern sea line, and, knitting her face into a look of resolution, she said :

‘It is God’s will. But, Mr. Selby, it is a dreadful death to die.’

‘I am pleased when you look so,’ said I, ‘but not when you speak so. It is God’s will,

as you say. But what is that will? What's to be our fate? Look how those blue shadows in the ice open and widen. The bergs appear close together; hundreds of fathoms separate them in reality, and if we are to drift into the huddle why shouldn't we scrape through?'

'To where?'

'To where? . . . There may be open water beyond, and a ship.'

'No, no, land!' she cried, 'land! See the shadow of it. It was visible in the telescope only a little while ago: now I see it like a forming cloud. It will be all ice to the rocks, and some break will let us in and we shall drift deep and be locked up and left—and left ——'

And now she could scarcely articulate for some spasm in her throat, and her poor white face was all awork with the horrors of her imagination.

It made me sullen to hear her, she

reasoned so well, beyond any trick that I had for cheering her.

'We must wait and hope,' said I; 'we are not in the ice yet; there may come a ship.'

And setting my teeth I swung the glass out of its brackets fiery with some passing mood of wrath born of hopelessness and helplessness; for no sailor will stand at gaze and be deserted by his spirit as a man whilst there is a chance for life, though it be dim as a corposant in a burst of wet squall; but put him in my place—as I then was; aboard a dismasted hull rolling to her waterways in a steady pouring sea, a doom of ice filling the horizon to leeward: how should a sailor act as a man *then* save by a stony endurance that sounds gallantly if you call it heroic fortitude?

But the girl had boiled some cocoa: it waited: so I begged leave to hand her below out of the ceaseless howl of the ice-charged

wind. Yet neither of us stayed long. Sae could not eat, and for my part 'twas as much as I could do to gulp down the steaming cocoa, good as it was.

I believe the sun set soon after two ; the sky was everywhere of a wild crimson, flashing gorgeously where the luminary was ; the sea came running in hard green lines, tall with passing heads, out of the splendour ; *then* the ice was a wonderful scene indeed, delicately tinctured as it was with the redness. The shadow of the land hung afar in a dim, pink cloud, but though the barrier had been plain in view for some while I could not swear that within the last hour we had sensibly closed it. This gave me a little hope—though I didn't know any : I bade Miss Otway note it and she agreed with me—she had a sailor's eye for atmospheric distance — that the ice looked no nearer than it had within the past hour.

‘Can we be in the grip of a westerly

current?' thought I. Then, before the blaze faded in the west, I hauled down the flag and hoisted the burning lantern, for the delicate figures of the ice in the remote recesses where the film of it died out were so cheating in their likeness to ships lifting canvas and heading for us, that I could not persuade myself but one *must* prove a vessel—if not now, then presently.

I obliged Miss Otway to go below when the night fell. It was too cold for her. She was like to freeze to death. The ice loomed as a range of snow-covered cliff to leeward: it showed of a savage and deadly paleness under the stars which sheeted down weakly to it, though here and there one brighter than the rest glowed like a lighthouse lantern on some faint point. It was a wonderfully brilliant night, however, no moon that I remember, but overhead the larger stars had the rich tremble you see in the tropics; I had never seen such a field of brilliants—the star-

dust hovered like mist, and the height of the sky that night was awful to my solitary gaze.

At about eight o'clock we were, as I reckoned, about five miles distant from the nearest elbow of the ice. But though a tall sea still ran, giving the hull the lofty motions of a stately dancer, the wind was sensibly taking off. A frightful time was this! for if the hull struck on the hurl of such a surge as still roared under us, she would go to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. I was constantly looking over the side, reckoning to find us setting on to some detached mass of drift stuff, flat, but not the less deadly for being awash, but saw none. Suddenly I perceived a light upon the horizon right over the bows. I fancied my vision deceived me, that the trend of the ice was not as I imagined it to be in that darkness, that the light was some burning mountain far past the barrier, and that a shift of wind or change of stream or tide had altered the bearings: this I conceived and

rushed headlong for a bull's-eye, which I flashed upon the compass ; but no ! the indications were as before.

What, then, was that light ahead ? Miss Otway had followed me when I fled up the companion steps with a lighted bull's-eye.

' What is it ? ' she cried.

' What's that ? ' I exclaimed, pointing ahead in the starlight.

But now, looking, I beheld a luminous arched cloud : it soared, always arched, increasing in brightness till the brow of it stood about twenty degrees above the horizon : the brightest of the stars shone wanly through it : then, whilst we watched, flashes of fire, darting like lightning, leapt from it ; they changed into spiral columns of the brilliance of sunlight, scores of them, and they went twisting and streaming out of the cloud with the look of the rush of the Milky Way to the Zenith, whirling and winding their strands of fire into a very rope of flame, whose end seemed to

search the furthest stardust. This wonderful, beautiful, sublime scene of joyous dancing, inwreathing lights, faded, but was quickly followed in the same quarter where the fiery curved cloud had shone by rich, straw-coloured arches of flame, linking and sinking and soaring, changing on a sudden with a vast spread of light, exactly fan shaped, and jewelled with colours manifold as the rainbow, as though it reflected some giant prism.

‘What is it?’ said Miss Otway, standing close beside me and speaking in a voice subdued by awe and astonishment.

‘The Aurora Australis,’ I answered, knowing it must be that by descriptions I remembered.

We lost all sense of time in watching. In some of the sublimest recesses of that show of fire it was as though the heaven of God were opening: one held one’s breath not knowing what the next revelation would be, what spectacle of winged spirit shapes would glance upon one’s mortal vision out of those

chasms of splendour which looked, with the glory that burned in them, to have been cloven to the very Throne.

‘Mark this!’ I cried, and as I spoke—the vast fan of light then fading and no more lightning-like fire leaping—the wind that had been a fresh breeze dropped as if by magic: the sky over the bows darkened into its night of stars: the sea fell into a sloppy tumble, and within a quarter of an hour the hull was rolling quietly upon the long, wide swell of these seas with so oil-like a calm upon the steady run of the folds that, close to our port quarter, I watched the image of a bright star lengthen and shrink as it rode, till, but for the intense, dread cold of the atmosphere, you would have thought yourself becalmed near the line.

‘We may drift north and go clear after all,’ said I, taking the lighted bull’s-eye out of the companion and looking at the binnacle by it.

‘Do you hear the thunder?’ said Miss Otway, following me.

I listened : it was not thunder but the crackling of ice. There was no roar of sea, no howl of gale now to kill that sound ; it rolled up through the night from the southward in bursts and shocks like explosions of heavy artillery ; it swept over the smooth swell which looked liked smoking grease as the huge rounds noiselessly floated eastward, and it sounded as though a thunderstorm were raging over the ice.

And still that brief peace that was in the night, spite of the distant thundering of the ice, was a wonderful refreshment to the spirits after the ceaseless flush of the surge to the side and the steady roar of the gale on high, shrieking as it split upon the barbs of ice the length of bulwarks bristled with. More : a change of weather might now happen to drive us northward, to drift us clear of the bergs, at all events, and so extend our chance of being fallen in with and rescued.

I stayed on deck till after nine watching

anxiously for any signs of a change of weather. Miss Otway came and went: she was too restless and fearful to linger below, but the frost in the night wind was too stinging to allow her to remain long above. When I went into the cabin I left the hull rolling slowly upon a swell of the sea polished as ebony; nay, so glass-like was that swollen mirror that all about us the water was sprinkled with the images of stars, with one ice-like wake swinging like a pendulum as the silver of it seemed to sink.

I mixed a tumbler of hot rum and sat down before the stove to smoke a pipe, with the young lady's consent; there was a good stock of tobacco, cigars, and a little collection of pipes in the cabin that had been occupied by Captain and Mrs. Burke. Our talk was, you will suppose, all about our situation. I assured her there was little to fear saving the ice; and talked—the thing then coming into my head—of a sailor who had gone sealing

for three years with one Captain Smyley ; this same skipper having spent nearly half a century betwixt the River Plate and the South Shetlands.

‘These waters are plentifully frequented,’ said I. ‘A century ago in such a case as this we shouldn’t have had much to hope for. What was to come? In half a year a score of yellow, humpbacked, round bowed waggons blowing away under bladder-like sails, with topmast struck and nothing but the log to tell the longitude—that was about the sum of the navigation. There was no Australia then ; nothing but a Western American coast yielding a month’s saunter from Acapulco to the Philippines—wonderful that they should have ever got a Spaniard to face the ice down here.’

‘Did they?’

‘Why, yes ; they sent treasure to Europe in galleons named after saints, and when they saw a waterspout they held up their swords

as crosses, and bade the thing be off in Latin.'

'Ships were as safe then as they are now,' said she, pulling off a thick glove and toasting her hand, on which sparkled a diamond or two. 'Why should this vessel have been dismasted? What progress is there to boast of when you think of this hull? Can't they plant masts which will keep erect?'

'Had that been, you and all others who were here when the squall struck you would be deeper under water than the fangs of the biggest iceberg afloat,' I answered, with a half smile at her eager gravity, as though there were nothing to interest us now but shipbuilding!

'If my life is preserved I'll never go to sea again,' she said.

'You'll have had enough of it.'

'I came for my health and it seems I have come to die.'

'Has your health improved?'

‘Yes—perhaps; I don’t feel whilst I talk as if the voyage had done me much good.’

‘You’ll write an account of these experiences when you return, and the Queen will send for you that she may see and converse with as wonderful a heroine as ever flourished in her reign.’

‘What have I done to be a heroine?’

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and turned to lift the tumbler of grog that was yet half full; when my hand was arrested as though paralysed by an extraordinary noise, smooth, fierce, seething. I listened a moment, then sprang to the companion steps.

CHAPTER XVII

THE THICK OF IT

My instant belief was we were foul of ice, scaling some side of crystal mountain smooth as though chiselled. But when I opened the companion door I was nearly flung to the bottom of the steps by a very volcanic shock of gale, white as a cloud with snow and hail. I sprang again and gained the deck, and, shutting the door, got to leeward of the companion.

A furious Cape Horn squall was blowing over the ocean in smoke—from what quarter I had then to find out. The still scene of starlight night and sluggish rolling ocean was vanished. Already, with the magical swiftness of the weather of these regions, a sea was got

up and beginning to race and foam. There was nothing to see. The night was blind with howling storm. When I had left the deck there was not so much as a rag of cloud to be seen in the sky ; and now it was blowing a whole gale, which looked to boil with the snow that fled with it, and everywhere it was of a midnight blackness.

The rush of the wind was over the port quarter ; but then the hull would be slewing for the trough, and how her head was when I had gone below I could not have told. Keeping this bearing of the wind in mind, I rushed to the cabin, picked up the burning bull's-eye, and, springing to the captain's berth, darted the flame on to the tell-tale, and saw that this squall or gale was out of about south-south-west.

When I took my eyes from the compass I saw Miss Otway standing, white as milk, in the doorway.

‘ What is it ? ’ she asked.

‘A heavy squall—perhaps the first of a gale; but that,’ said I, with a flourish of the bull’s-eye to the compass, ‘gives us good news; we shall blow clear of the ice. The wind is sou’-sou’-west. What do you say to that?’ and, forcing the noise of a jolly laugh, I came out of the berth and hooked up the bull’s-eye ready to my hand.

We had seen the ocean all day long, clear of ice north and east; icebergs we knew were there, but their summits had settled—our drift had put leagues betwixt them and us; therefore I was not immediately fearful—on the score of ice, I mean. But if it was going to blow as hard as I had just now felt it, what was to become of the hull? Such fury and weight of wind must speedily raise the seas into cliffs, and then God knows how it would fare with the sheer hulk with not a rag, nor the means of stretching a rag, to enable her to look up to it, to shoulder it off with her bow, to lie hove to, in short, as a ship should.

In an hour, the dance was wild even to madness ; my own brain reeled to it ; sick I was *not* in the sense of nausea. Was it sickness of soul then ? But I recollect that many times when the hull fell off the top of a sea into the valley, sliding as though she was shooting off some Niagara-like edge, a horrible feeling of faintness and prostration attended the descent. Never before had I suffered so at sea ; but then, never before had I been tossed in a dismasted hull in a gale of wind sixty degrees south latitude.

Miss Otway lay almost lifeless. I shored her up on a couch by backs of chairs which I lashed ; I heaped clothes from her bed on her, and got hot brandy for her, and encouraged her as best I could. There was nothing to be done on deck. The sea was flying in white sheets over the waist and forecastle ; the glare of the brine breaking close aboard showed you the snow ; but looking around was like staring into a well.

It was a strange sort of snow, too, that fell. Once in the cabin I took notice of it on my coat: it was in small grains, round as shot, of a size from mustard seed to buckshot; a dry, pure white: not hail.

But two hours after the gale began, the snow ceased and the wind lessened; I watched from the companion-way, and observed but little water flying athwart. With such observations I was forced to be satisfied, and spent the hours in the cabin, keeping an eye on the stove, boiling a hot drink now and again for the life and support of it, tending Miss Otway, from time to time peering through the hatch where the iron sweep of the wind seemed to unflesh the face, wondering, for ever wondering, whether the next hurl would be followed by a crash of the side, and how long we should be in perishing when the hull split.

I should have imagined myself too anxious —nay, to put it plainly, too alarmed to sleep, and it seemed that I went up many times to

take a look around ; and still I must have slept, for I started from my chair in a sudden terror of dream or noise, and with a lurch of the hull fell upon my knees, but was up instantly.

The motion of the craft had changed ; the moment I had my wits I felt that the sea was pyramidal, which told me there had been a quite recent shift of wind. I cannot imagine anything more dislocating, more unnerving, more brain sickening, than the leaps and rolls of the hull upon the sea that, by the movement, I knew was darting in almost perpendicular thrusts, spear shaped billows lifting in ebon darts and daggers, and putting a frightful wildness into the flings of the fabric.

Miss Otway lay with her eyes shut, and seemed asleep ; a small fire glowed in the stove, and the lighted lantern swung in the centre of the cabin as though some invisible hand grasped it, seeking to jerk it off its hook. I took the bull's-eye and went on deck, and

found the wind a dry gale, but observed a thickness as of fog in it, but it was too dark to make sure. I staggered to the binnacle and saw the wind was blowing out of north again: a cruel shift! I stared and smelt for ice, but saw no loom, and tasted no more than the freezing coldness of the blast.

What was the hour? I went below and found it half-past eight o'clock. Oh! what an interminable darkness was that! Where was the ice? It could not be far off. What and whither was our drift? I felt like a madman then.

Miss Otway slept on. I believe it might have been an hour and a half after I had awakened that, not knowing but that the poor young heart in her had been stopped by terror, or the delicate blood in her frozen, I stooped to view her face, the lamp burning dimly; she showed like a piece of exquisitely chiselled marble: I can't tell why, but her whiteness

seemed to my mood to exactly fit the bitterness of this time, the frost, the snow, the ice, the wild gale and foaming waters; was I as mad then as I had felt some time before, to bend over her and get a fancy of her into my head as a spirit of these wild and desolate parts? Put yourself in my place and you'll not wonder to find your brow hot with fancies more desperately and tragically strange than such a crazy notion as this.

She opened her eyes whilst I looked, and I stood erect with a sigh of relief, half turning to fling my cap down whilst I ran the length of my sleeve along my forehead for the refreshment of the wet of the snow. She sat up and watched me, whilst I saw in her face she was heeding the extravagant tumbling of the hull.

‘It seems to be blowing a gale,’ she said.

‘Ay,’ said I, ‘but we’re still alive. Feel these jumps: no empty cask could better them.’

‘Will you remove these chairs that I may sit up?’

I did so. Whilst I knelt beside her to cast the lashings adrift she eyed me intently, as though she would read my very brain ; she then sighed, but said nothing, and the road being clear she drew her feet out of the covering and sought to rise, but, after a short struggle with the furious deck, sat again.

I stood before the stove waiting for day-break, my eye glancing from one frothing cabin window to another and thence to the skylight. At last she said :

‘You’ve a brave heart, Mr. Selby, but it can hold out no longer ; I read despair in your face. If the end is to come, may it come quickly. You have behaved to me with a noble kindness. I can but thank you—I can but thank you,’ and she held out her hand with her eyes full of tears.

I bowed my head over her hand ; it was

an excuse to fetch a breath or two, I would not just then trust myself to speak. Then said I :

‘I’ll not disguise the truth : our situation is perilous, as God, who, let us believe, is watching over us, knows. But I should be no true man to feel the despair you tell me you read in my face. Daylight may find us a sight to hearten us.’

She shook her head.

‘Well, but don’t let your spirits die. If a wish could help us I’d be above, if *your* safety was to be got at so small a cost. But see, now, I’ll run up on deck and let you know if there’s anything like the loom of ice about. It *may* prove all right with us—it *may* end in our lives being preserved.’

But all the same, with a heart as heavy as ever hers could be, I clawed my way to the companion steps for yet another stare into the blackness.

It was not yet daybreak ; but when some

while after the faint, grey light sifted through the blowing, swelling, roaring gloom, the sight struck to my very heart and I was sure we were doomed. The sea was running in hills of liquid lead; many clouds of mist were in the wind and they blew athwart the hull like bursts of steam; snow in places was rushing in horizontal lines out of dark low clouds flying southwards. Ice was all about us. The first object that dawn revealed, whilst I stood in the companion-way watching, was a mountain of ice on the bow; as features of it stole out a snow-squall looked to have fouled a whole stack of pinnacles on the left of the berg; it was dark as smoke there, with snow whirling in a very maelström of froth-like whiteness; the seas slipped their foam up its side to a height of fifty feet, and the brine flashed in clouds of crystals against the dull, marble-like face, which showed smooth as a wall through the haze and the whirl of flying vapour that shrieked athwart our decks to it.

It was but one. I counted twenty coming and going amid the shadows of the squalls and flying masses of fog. You would have supposed that a fleet somewhere hidden were firing great guns, so thunderous was the splintering of those bergs majestically rocking their mighty masses. The nearest—that on the starboard bow—was about a mile off. Others showed to port and astern : one heap, like an island, darkened the haze on the port bow. The gale had apparently broken up the barrier and we were in the thick of the floating bodies.

Miss Otway came to the foot of the companion steps and waited for me to make way for her. I stepped out and she ascended the steps and looked round the sea, but in silence. Her face was hardened into stone by despair. Hours of suspense and grief, hours spent in the most awful kind of loneliness the imagination can figure, with the darkness of the spirit of death for ever upon her heart, had

done their work with the poor young lady : sensation was dumb.

And now there was nothing to do but await the end, come what might. I let her stand a little, looking, then taking her by the arm, gently but firmly, conducted her below and seated her where she had lain during the night. I was resolved that my own despair should not be visible to her, and partly to cover myself, so to speak, and partly for the good of the thing, I boiled some coffee, and put food on the deck near the stove ; but one looked at such a repast with the emotions of a malefactor to whom breakfast is served whilst the hangman waits.

Whilst I was at this work she addressed me calmly :

‘ There is no doubt, I suppose, that we shall strike the ice ? ’

‘ It’s most inevitable,’ I answered.

‘ If it happens, shall we be better off down here than on deck ? ’

‘Let it happen,’ said I.

‘If we are to strike the ice,’ she said, ‘I should wish to be drowned quickly. I would rather die at once than be thrown soaked on the ice to lie a little and freeze—it would take time—I fear the sufferings. I am not afraid of death, I wish it to be quick.’

‘There’s no ice nearer to us than a mile, that I can make out,’ I said, then handed her a pannikin of coffee. ‘Pray drink this.’

She took it and raised it to her lips.

‘If the hull strikes, will it go to pieces instantly?’ she asked.

‘Who can tell? She might beach herself and find us a home till the berg floated north, where the smoke of our fire will be seen.’

She sank into silence with her eyes fastened upon the deck. When I offered her food she shook her head. My breakfast consisted of half a cup of coffee.

Within a quarter of an hour I was on deck

again, but the scene was the same as before, saving that the ice mountain that had been upon our starboard bow was now right ahead, whilst on our starboard quarter, within perhaps half a mile, was a small island of ice, about sixty feet high, not before visible. The compass gave me the wind blowing steadily from one quarter. But then I could make nothing of bearings within three or four points on board a helpless hull, swinging in a high sea, with a send of her head when she was rushed out of a hollow that made me sometimes think she was going to give her stern to the weather.

At one o'clock it was a savage and tremendous scene of warring waters and flying sky of soot, and giant forms of ice vanishing and reappearing amid headlong flights of wool-white vapour, and through all, in deep notes, ran the thunder of the surge-smitten, frozen heights, with frequent rending and crashing noises of dislocation. I was

now very sure that our drift was not less than three miles an hour, and perhaps four. This I gathered by observing a vast shape of ice that suddenly showed off the starboard bow. It was nearly a mile long, and I should think two hundred feet high. It was a grand, truly sublime ocean piece, with its numerous lofty arches and caverns, out of which the sea, in recoil, flashed in immense bursts of foam. I spied the white wings of birds glancing upon it, but I had it not often very clear in sight, for the steam-like smother drove down at quick intervals, leaving some pale eminence gleaming on high against the whirl of the clouds, to vanish in some swift outfly of snow, so that the whole thing would be as completely gone to the eye as if it had sunk.

But by staying and watching it as often as it emerged in whole or in part, I got at the rate of our drift. It was quickly on our port bow with others coming out of the thickness to leeward, all wild and terrific in that dull

light of storm, with the glare of the leaping foam at their base and their own ghastly stare through the rent curtains of cloud flying under the dark sky.

Soon after two, when it was almost dark, I thought we were lost, for I saw the loom of an iceberg right abeam to leeward; but whether it was God's guidance of the devoted hull, or that the set of the long rolling sea ran a sort of sweep of tide round these floating islands, when we were within a musket shot of the mass, with an occasional shock of loose ice sounding through the hulk, our drift made a little departure. I vow it was for all the world as though the fabric was alive and, dreading her fate, avoided it, or as though she were under command, with a cool hand and a critical eye for sea measurement at the helm. Certain it is we drove past clear; it might be that we owed our preservation to the rebound of the sea.

It was almost black with the night when

that berg was on our lee quarter, but I knew by a sudden enormous roar of water, and by an indescribably hissing sound lasting for a few minutes, as though a thousand locomotives were blowing off steam, that an immense mass of the island had fallen, not very many ships' lengths distant, which I have no genius to do justice to, nor even to communicate, though I need but close my eyes to behold the terrible picture, with its uproar of trampling seas, and howling wind, and cracking masses. A little after four in the morning, whilst I sat in the cabin with Miss Otway, every instant expecting the hull to strike, her motions grew suddenly quiet. I felt her rise and fall upon a long swell, and knew instinctively by the feel of her that she was under the lee of something.

I sprang to my feet and ran on deck. It was pitch dark, with a strange phantasmal glimmer on either hand, so vague, so indeterminable I could not see it when I looked at

it. The roar of the gale, the hiss and beat of the driven seas, came as from a distance. Thrice as high as the masthead of a ship sounded the low, continuous thunder of the wind, as though it blew over mountain tops ; but down where we were it was calm. Icy gusts came in moans from half a dozen quarters. The long, invisible heave was as rhythmic as the ocean pulse of swell. I understood we were embayed and foresaw certainly now that our being stranded, or being hammered to pieces against the ice, was only a question of minutes.

I went into the cabin with a loathing of life coming into me out of the sheer despair that was as frost on my heart, caring not a curse how it went, so sick I was of it all after the unendurable hours of watching and expectation I had passed through ; and then again I felt that, whatever was to happen, it was right I should be by the poor girl's side : not that it was in my power to comfort her—

not, indeed, if the hull went to pieces, that I could be of the least use to her or myself, but I was company for her, and out of me she'd get some solace of companionship in what I reckoned these dying minutes of ours.

‘Has the wind fallen? Where are we?’ she shrieked as I approached her.

‘We are embayed,’ I answered. ‘We are got under the lee of something.’

Just as I spoke those words a harsh, grating roar ran through the hull; the vessel trembled as though in the first throe of bursting; another like roar succeeded; I felt the thrill of the scraping of the bilge and keel as the fabric was rushed by some ponderous heave of swell. Again, another huge thrust of the sea, another long roar of scraping keel and bilge, another quiver and thrill throughout the hulk as though every timber was straining ere flying to the shock of an explosion. She lay right over to starboard. The lamp swung and lay hard against the

upper deck. Whatever was movable fetched away. So acute was the angle that Miss Otway, unable to maintain her seat upon the couch, shot from it to me; but I was firmly planted, saw her coming, and received her so that she was not hurt, and with a vigorous swing I cleared and placed her breathless and moaning in a cleated armchair that stood close to where I sat.

The blind, soft, thunderous thrusts of the sea continued. I heard the water in tons washing over the decks, but every time this happened a roar of grinding and scaling shook the hull as she was driven by the wash of the swell higher and yet higher. The companion was closed and no water descended. I knew by the noise of the sea that the hull lay broadside to the swing of the swell. I got out of my chair, but was heavily thrown, and could scarcely regain my feet, so extreme was the slant, and so completely did it pin me against the cabin wall.

As regular as the rush of the floating folds was the thrust of them, and now I grew sensible that the heave was like to strand us high and dry, the job of it being a different labour than rocks or the grit of the beach of earth would have made, so greasy was the ice. The water poured over the decks every time the swell struck the hull, but in a little while I found each volume to be weakening in weight, and after the fabric had been driven in this grinding way in a sort of pulsing of blows, deafening with the bursts of the brine against the side and over the decks, each onward slide grew shorter and shorter, until presently she lay without motion, with an occasional shudder running through her from the beat of the sea, but at intervals so varying as to persuade me she was fairly high and dry, and within the wash of the foam of the larger rollers only.

But the list or angle was horrible. I was unable to move without going on all fours. I

crawled in this wise to Miss Otway, and told her to remain where she was, not to attempt to stir lest she should break her neck, whilst I crept on deck to take a look at our situation if it was visible.

‘What has happened do you think?’ she cried.

‘We are stranded upon some beach of an ice island I expect,’ I replied.

‘Hark to that!’ she shrieked, as a sudden sea smote the bilge and roared in foaming recoil. ‘If you go on deck you’ll be washed away.’

‘I’ll see to it. That blow was weak. We have been thrust high. Feel what a desperate slope it is. I pray God no sudden shock of sea may launch us afresh.’

With that I crawled to the companion steps, every bone aching like rheumatism with the contortions of my figure in my efforts to move.

CHAPTER XVIII

IMPRISONED

I MIGHT have guessed there would be no more to see now than when I had first looked. I stood in the companion with my head just out, holding the door as close shut as it would lie with my body in the way; and hardly had I put my head through when a whole green sheet of water tumbled over the port bulwarks and roared in a cataractal deluge down the steep, boiling white, through the wreckage of smashed bulwarks. I ducked, but not in time to stop a rush into the cabin.

I guessed, by the uncommon blackness, that we were in a hollow betwixt high cliffs; I beheld an illusive paleness, the vague, spectral faintness of rocks of ice or snow-covered

acclivities on either hand, but no features of them were in the least degree discernible. I durst not let go of the companion to look over the side, but I judged by the deep, hollow noise overhead that a strong gale still blew, and from a distance came the strong, coarse seething of a high sea.

Still, the beat of the swell against the hull was not often now, which made me suspect it was no iceberg we had stranded on but land, one of the New Orkneys or South Shetlands group, because the bating of the swell told that a tide ran, and I had read in that book about the South Atlantic in the cabin that the rise and fall of the tide down here was very considerable, that gales of wind often swelled the water high above its natural level, as was shown by the many skeletons of whales found lying twenty or thirty feet above high-water mark.

But until the dawn broke nothing could be imagined; I closed the companion door

and crawled back to where Miss Otway sat.

She was so postured by the angle of the deck that she could not get out of her chair ; she begged me to help her ; I drew her out and held her until she had sunk upon the floor, and then I sat down beside her on the hard plank, the carpet having been rolled up and stowed away when the cabin was flooded in the outfly that had dismasted the ‘Lady Emma.’ Not so much water as I supposed had tumbled down ; it lay the length of the cabin wall and was fast draining off.

‘Have you been able to see where we are ?’ she exclaimed.

‘No. But though there’s no doubt we’ve beached on ice, I believe the land’s close aboard.’

‘What land ?’

‘Coronation Island, if any. That was the island in the way of our drift ; we’ve been making a straight course for it.’

We paused to hearken to a heavy flooding of water overhead, but the blow that had sheeted the brine over the hull was as weak as a summer ripple is to an angry surge compared with the thumps which had driven us to where we now lay.

‘The sea will have made a clean sweep of the decks,’ said she.

‘There was little to go. What but the galley? The companion has weathered it out, happily for us.’

‘Oh, Mr. Selby, what can we now do? What is to become of us?’ she cried with sudden hysterical passion of grief and terror.

‘We must find out where we are. Better here, anyway, than knocking about among the ice outside, with the prospect every next minute of being squashed into pulp. Oh, *that* was too terrible to have gone on bearing! The perpetual apprehension was like to have driven us overboard, mad. Why, this is peace, this is rest.’

‘What a time it has been! What a time it is!’ she cried. ‘When will the day break? If we are upon an iceberg——’

She was arrested by a second thunder-shock of water overhead, yet weak as a blow of the sea, though the hull trembled fore and aft.

The lamp glowed and shed a good light, the body of it lying hard against the upper deck, so sharp was the angle; it was strange to see it stirless there, strange to feel the stillness of the hull, save when a blow of swell made her quiver. The fire was out; but even had not all the fuel fetched away into the wash of the wet, I had not dared kindle a fresh one, lest in the trembling fit then upon me, and on such a roof-like slope as that, I should stumble, or by some helpless flourish set the ship in flames.

I crawled on my knees to the couch, and pulled the clothes from it and covered Miss Otway with them, swathing her head and so

wrapping her that nothing showed but a little piece of the face. The poor girl's teeth chattered, and she shivered ceaselessly. By carefully crawling I got upon the table and managed to get hold of a glass and a decanter of wine. She drank a little and I took a good pull of the wine myself. Indeed it was an extraordinary situation—the hull on her beam ends, the cabin alight, we two crouched on the deck, the stillness after the fury we had come through, the stillness, I say, saving a low roar of distant sea, with an occasional beat of the swell upon the hulk, and the scaling and rushing of water overhead. An amazing situation indeed; there is nothing like it, nothing stranger in the maritime records, that I can recollect.

At last the starboard cabin windows, high in the broadside, showed of a pale steel grey; I went on my hands and feet to the steps and reached the deck. I stood a little while in the companion-way thunderstruck; I was con-

founded and could not credit my sight. The hull lay stranded in a very well of ice. Ahead and astern rose masses of cliffs to an altitude of four or five hundred feet. The vessel lay on a frozen beach ; 'twas a sloping sweep of the stuff, apparently linking the iceberg astern to the ice over the bows. The bight or bay we had drifted into was ramparted by the iceberg which sank from a vast terrace to a point in an arm of natural breakwater like marble ; but the ice ahead was fixed to the face of the land. After looking a little I spied the iron frown of dusky rocks perpendicular and smooth as though planed, showing amidst the snow.

Past the hinder ice and beyond the giant limb of marble-like breakwater was the rolling ocean. It still blew hard, the seas raced angrily. Whatever of ice they smote they flashed upon ; over the lower parts of the ice terrace the surge was bursting in lofty clouds, bright as light. The heave came

round the point in a wide swell, which did not break in foam upon the beach where we lay, but swept silent, in a glass-green volume, along the slope, just as the foamless lift of the sea washes past the side of a ship; it broke only where it met with anything rugged, and quickly lost its weight in the curve, soundlessly recoiling from the base of the iceberg astern, though mightily troubling the surface of the water by conflict with the succeeding heave.

The sky between the cliffs was wild with flying scud and rusty brown masses of vapour rushing southwards. The vessel lay close in to the land; she rested on her side at an angle of hard upon fifty degrees. On either hand was open sky, the picture of it to port showing as at the extremity of an immense ravine. Save but for sudden, quick shootings of little short-lived draughts and blasts, the calm and even the repose down here was as though we were in a well. The swell

never swept nearer to us than twenty feet. I crept to the side and lay over, watching anxiously, and thus made sure of this after following the quiet sweep of at least twenty successive heaves of brine.

The desolation was awful! The picture savage, forbidding, terrifying beyond imagination to one immured with its clouded crystal heights over the bows, and the rugged slopes of ice over the stern forking into fifty shapes of pinnacle, turret, spire, column, tower, as though on the flat of the summit were the ruins of a city of marble.

The decks were swept of everything save the companion. Wheel, binnacle, capstans, galley, all were gone. I watched the ocean rolling past the arm of ice astern, it was but a bit of it. The great berg that formed the bay blocked the view of the deep; there was nothing to see but the abrupt white walls ahead and astern, and the flying soot overhead and away down to port, and, on the right,

tall cliffs of ice and snow glazing the land, with here and there a space of staring, black rock.

Our isolation was shocking. My heart seemed to stop whilst I looked around, realising the terrors and hopelessness of this new imprisonment by the granite-hued light that was gaining a little in power. Though a whaler stood within half a mile of the coast, how should she see us? It would be hard enough to discern the speck of wreck we made had the bay of ice in which we rested gaped naked to the sea, but we were as much hidden here as if we had gone to the bottom. We were worse off, indeed, than had we stranded upon a floating berg, because in *that* case we might have fallen in with the ice which might have split and freed us; but now we were aground upon ice hardening into the face of an island and stationary; months might pass before the body we were upon broke away and became

a water-borne bulk, and then, in the throes of the liberation of the frozen cliffs, what of splintering, of volcanic-like upheaval and disruption might happen to crush the little toy of hull lying after many months as she lay now?

I don't doubt I stared about me with something of a madman's wildness, glancing up at the inaccessible heights, then at the sea rolling in white lines beyond the limb of ice, then into the desolation of the whirling sky on the left, till, recollecting that I had a companion who looked to me for heart and encouragement, whom, by God's mercy, wonderful as it would afterwards appear, I might yet be the means of delivering from this hideous situation, I pulled my wits together and returned to the cabin.

The poor young lady was on the deck before the black stove as I had left her. She could not have stood upon that angle of plank without danger and distress. She began to question me in a voice that shuddered with

the cold. I answered I would talk with her when I had lighted a fire, for I had now some spirit and saw things a little clearly, and was no longer afraid of setting the hull in flames.

I split up a bunk board, and picked a bucket full of capsized coal out of the wash to leeward, as I may call it, and made a fire ; but I moved with pain and difficulty ; the decks were wet, and as slippery as though coated with ice, and the slope was that of a ship bulwarks under.

When the fire was blazing I helped the young lady to sit close beside it, and went on deck for some life-lines for this cabin. I moved with less trouble above, for the life-lines I had before set up were still stretched along. Every rope that I handled was like bar iron, but with infinite trouble I succeeded in getting a length below and stretching it here and there, which done I was able to use my legs with some freedom.

The stove was violently aslant, but it was

possible to boil a kettle, and whilst I waited for a hot drink I crouched beside the girl, grateful for the comforting heat of the flames. I told her plainly that we were stranded and ice-locked ; that we must resolve to exert our patience and make the best of our deplorable situation. She cleared her head of the cover I had wrapped about her, and stared at me dumbly for a minute or two with a face as white as though moonlit, and her fair hair full of sparkles with the light of the lamp that still glowed hard-slanted against the upper deck.

‘Do I understand,’ she exclaimed in a low voice, painful to hear with the tremulous gasps that shook it, ‘that we are to remain in this condition until—until——’ She stopped, then added, ‘but until *when*? We are stranded and hidden and must perish.’

‘Listen to me,’ said I, ‘for this is our chance as I see it is as a sailor: suppose us beached for months as we now are—though

who's to predict *that*?—for within twenty-four hours may come a gale out of another quarter that shall free us and drive us amongst the ice to our destruction—take it we are to be stranded here : I have read the ship's papers, know the contents of the hold, and promise you, though no chance of rescue should happen for a twelvemonth, nay, for a couple of years, help, when it comes, shall find us alive so far as life may be kept in us by food and drink and warmth.'

She buried her face : I think it nearly killed her to hear me talk of a twelvemonth or two years. Then, flashing upon me as it were with a sudden dropping of her hands and the stare of her desperate grief and horror, she cried :

' Is there no hope beyond the waiting for the deliverance which may never happen ? ' and without stopping for an answer she went on : ' How are we to live even for a week in a hull we cannot move about on ? '

'That's the very least of our troubles,' said I. 'Come, you have spirit—the heart of an Englishwoman beats in you. You must put some face of courage and faith upon this business. We are alive. Keep on thinking of *that*. Consider what we have come through. We might have been thrown upon the ice without this shelter.'

'We have stranded on an island, you say?'

'I think so.'

'What island?'

I answered her.

'Is there no harbour in it, no place where ships touch, no place where men are? If they came fishing down here for whales and seals there should be a port.'

I put my hand upon a life-line and walked to the captain's cabin. It was as dark as night there, for the heel of the hulk depressed the cabin windows to within arms' reach of the beach, as it looked. I lighted a bull's-eye, and, finding the chart I required, returned with it.

It was a chart of the discoveries made in these waters between 1819 and 1843. It outlined Graham Land down to sixty-eight degrees south, and a little more than sixty-eight degrees west, and submitted a shaded tracing of the South Shetlands ; but I was very certain that our island was none of *them*. I put the chart on Miss Otway's knee and threw the lamplight upon it, and said, pointing to Coronation Island and then to Laurie Island :

‘ Which of them this is I can’t tell you, but I should guess by our drift that it’s the bigger of the two, and that our lodgment’s here,’ and I put my finger upon a bight named Palmer’s Bay. ‘ Here’s a mountain at back of it, you see,’ said I, ‘ towering to a height of nigh four thousand five hundred feet ; it was the blue shadow we saw in the air, and our drift was nigh hard straight for that.’

She put her face close to the chart, listening, meanwhile, greedily to me.

‘ But here are many English names,’ said

she—‘Cape Dundas—Despair Rock—Saddle Island.’ She read thus a little; then went on: ‘Surely an island that has been named in this fashion is inhabited?’

‘Well, it may be. I hope it is,’ said I.

‘Here are big islands,’ she cried, pointing to the South Shetlands. ‘Aren’t there people upon *them*? And if so, couldn’t we manage to get to the place where they’re settled? It’s not far,’ she added, looking up at me.

‘It’s a long way,’ said I, ‘for all it looks but the span of a hand on this paper, and we have no boat.’

‘People must have been in some such another dreadful situation as this before now,’ she exclaimed. ‘How did they manage?’

‘We’ll manage, depend on’t’, said I, with all the hearty cheerfulness I could summon. ‘We’ll write letters to the sea, telling our distress, and send them adrift in bottles. I’ll fashion rafts out of some of the theatre stuff in the hold and send them afloat with the

story of our condition mastheaded on them in cans. It's not for us to be hopeless. Wouldn't you rather be here than knocking about amongst the ice ?'

'Oh yes,' she cried ; 'but if we are locked up—hidden away ?'

She started as if she would rise, and asked me to take her on deck that she might see where we were, but I thought proper to keep her below in the warmth and encourage her, and rouse her spirits by representations of our prospects of deliverance, before letting her view the situation of the hull ; in truth I could not look at her and observe how delicate and fragile she was, and reflect on the depressing, heart-subduing influence of the terrors and experiences she had passed through, without fearing the effect of a sudden shock, such as might prove the sight of the savage wildness of the frowning, frozen cradle in which the hull lay as in a tomb.

I went about to get some breakfast.

When I got on deck with a chopper to fill the kettle, I found that the mould of fresh-water ice I had split out of the scuttlebutt was gone. I had no mind to enter the hold ; indeed, I had not strength enough then to break open the frozen hatch-covers ; and water being wanted for a cup of hot coffee, I chipped at a spear of ice on the bulwark and found it sweet, and perhaps sweeter than the water we had been drinking. Why ? Because nearly all those frozen heads and devices of barbs and spikes were frozen snow and mist. But never could we lack fresh water in this part of the world ; the cliffs ahead and astern were fresh ; we were beached in fresh-water ice. Even in that early time of my distress, whilst I sucked a little piece of ice off the bulwarks to learn its quality, I found myself lifting up my eyes with amazement at those giant heights; formed, as I knew, of the vapour of the air and the sleet of the cloud and the gale. It was like thinking

of some vast, soft fog clinging to the face of the land and freezing there into precipitous iron-hard rocks.

Whilst making my way to the hatch with the ice, I heard a sudden great roar astern ; a sharp tremble ran through the hull as though a mine had been sprung close alongside ; the noise was exactly that of a broadside from a liner, every great gun discharged at once. Yet I saw no movement in the ice, nor heard any sound as of a fall. This put it into my head to fancy it might not be long before the great berg that was linked astern of us was sundered and on its way to join the rest of the mighty fleet, every one of which had had a like berth and such a despatch as awaited this.

I clawed my way to the side and looked over. The beach that held the berg to the main was perhaps a quarter of a mile long ; I could not be sure ; it went out of sight in a slope on the port hand. But, in comparison

with the mighty bulk it yoked to the island, it was a slender tie indeed, to be snapped in any moment of storm as you'd break a clay pipe-stem. I peered down, wondering if the severance happened whether we should go with the berg or be left a-dry under the cliff as we now lay ; but it was a hopeless and therefore a silly speculation ; though all the same I prayed heartily whilst I stood staring about me that the berg would go, and speedily, whether it took us or left us, since, whilst we lay hidden by it, there was not the remotest chance, that I could imagine, of our being rescued.

I remember thinking, as I turned from the rail and made with the ice in my hand towards the companion, that one of the hardest parts of this terrible experience for the poor girl below, though she would have to be dumb on the subject, was the prospect of being locked up with me—alone with a young man, a sailor, who was a stranger

without existence to her a few days ago ; to be locked up, I say, it might be for months, with a threat even of years in the run of time, with a person whose character and history she knew nothing about, whose calling sunk him far below her socially. This ran in my head with the swiftness of thought whilst I was going below, and after I was in the cabin going about the business of boiling coffee for a meal.

How could I make her mind easy, on the score, I mean, of our association, so that something at least of the weight of our distressful tragic situation should be lifted off her poor young heart ? But the answer my good sense gave me was the answer it had before returned, namely, she could only find me out by time, though to be sure I might shorten the period of her fear of me by a behaviour that could leave her in no doubt of my resolution to act as a man.

I can't express how deeply I pitied her,

how my very soul was moved to its depths by the sight of her as she sat in her loneliness and helplessness, a trueborn lady, gentle and fair, watching me, with her white face turning after me, as I moved ; sitting upon that desperate slope of deck with the red glow of the fire upon her, herself a shapeless bulk of furs and coverings in the lamplight that was growing dim.

When I drew to the stove she questioned me afresh upon our situation, and begged me to conduct her on deck. I answered presently, when she had broken her fast. She said :

‘ Only think how it would be with me if I were alone.’

I stopped in what I was about, and looking at her a little steadily, but with a smile, I said :

‘ I’m glad my presence is welcome to you. It will be owing to no fault of mine if it’s not always so whilst we’re together.’

A grateful look freshened her face with an expression of life that was like colour and a smile.

'Think of me alone here!' she said in a low voice. 'I should have gone mad days ago. It never could have come to my knowing that this hull had stranded amongst the ice. I should have destroyed myself in my craziness.'

'You have gone through too much,' said I, 'to miss of being rescued. You'll be saved and so shall I, and for no other reason, I dare say, than because I'm with you. I have some hope that this hulk will take a more comfortable posture. Did you hear a roar like an explosion just now astern?'

'Yes. Was it the ice?'

'Ay. But should it trim us, I hope it will not send us afloat.'

She listened whilst I told her of the huge berg that lay linked to the island by the beach of ice on which the hull rested. Then I

talked as cheerfully as I could of making this interior a tight, dry, warm room for her whilst we lay waiting for that help which was bound in some shape of whaler or sealer to come along. * She shuddered and looked around her with a face of sudden imploring grief; but I went on, speaking as heartily as I could.

‘We’ll make this cabin dry and warm,’ said I. ‘I’ll get that water to leeward there baled out. I’ll rout the carpet up on deck and see what the breeze will do for the brine in it. They’ve managed very well over and over again up in the Arctic latitudes for months and months with meaner accommodation and a poorer hold. I’ll stock this cabin that things may be handy. There’s plenty of oil aboard I hope. There’ll be coal to last us in the forepeak; we shall be helped out of this before it’s all used up.’

‘How long,’ she asked, ‘are we likely to remain here?’

‘It was a saying of Nelson that at sea everything is possible and nothing improbable. It’s certain these islands are visited. My intention is, Miss Otway, since we’re here, so to provide for ourselves that we may be alive when help comes. Do you see that?’

‘Oh yes.’

‘Don’t be scared, then, because I talk of provisioning and securing ourselves as though we were to be locked up for years.’

Whilst I talked I was at work getting breakfast. The angle of the deck was an abomination and a terrible hindrance, but I made no further trouble of it than my laboured motions expressed. Yet beyond the boiling of the kettle there was nothing to be done in the way of cooking owing to the slant of the stove. The discomfort was incredible. It was like being in a ship poised on her beam ends on the edge of a sea, magically arrested in her downward rush, and hanging fixed, as though capsizing.

All was as hushed in the interior as though we were in harbour. The seethe coming from the flashes of silent swell, whenever the dark green folds, blindly sweeping, tore themselves against some edge of ice, was too faint to invade us: the noise of the sea was shut out by the heights of ice astern, and no echo of the booming of the gale sweeping over the frozen summits penetrated. But for the insufferable posture of the hull my heart might have beaten with some sort of restfulness and even gratitude; for, dreadful as our situation was, it lacked the terrors of the past days and nights; we were at least safe for the time being, whilst in any hour gone by we might have been crushed to pieces; we had a right to look forward with some hope, because we were plentifully supplied with food; the hull was a stout shelter, and I could not conceive, unless there happened some convulsion of ice, that the swell of the bay, however enraged by storm, could hurt us; it might thump and

thrust us high, further out of its reach—that was all—and trim the vessel by so doing into a habitable structure.

These were my thoughts as I put some breakfast on the deck for my companion. It was impossible for her to help herself. I had to place the fiddles on the deck to save the food from slipping from her hand. I talked with so much confidence that, when she had made a light meal, I heard something like a note of her spirit in her voice, and saw a little light of kindling hope in her eyes. Presently she begged me to take her on deck, on which I helped her to stand, and, catching hold of her arm, conducted her to the companion steps.

She ascended painfully. I stepped out on deck and brought her to my side; and then, emerging, she looked around. Never can I forget that poor young lady's face as she gazed at the savage, desolate, frozen scene, realising the significance of it slowly.

She shrank, she cowered in the companion way; she shuddered violently, whilst her hand, with a wandering gesture, came to my arm. I see her now in memory turning her white face towards the towering mass astern, then looking at the dumb blankness of the ice cliffs ahead, with the bows of the beam-ended hulk rising to them as though upon a lift of sea.

‘Is this it? Is this it?’ she whispered.

She stared straight up at the flying gloom, blacking off the ghastly white edge of the iceberg in shadows of a ragged, smoke-like stuff; she strained her eyes at the little space of sea showing in angry, dark, flashing ridges past the huge ice projection that made the bay, shutting out from our sight all the rest of the ocean too. Then, turning to me, she tried to speak, swayed, with an effort to cover her face, and fainted.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. MOORE CONTINUES THE STORY

No news of Marie reached us after we received a letter by a brig called the 'Queen of the Night' which had spoken the 'Lady Emma' in the North Atlantic. She had sent us a sort of diary or journal: it was meant for her father and me: she wrote in spirits which, the entries showed, were gaining in brightness, and there was no doubt that her health had greatly improved. Some of her descriptions were very fine: she seemed to have thrown herself into the very life of the voyage and wrote of the sails, rigging, discipline and manœuvres of the vessel with the easy familiarity of an old sailor.

We gathered that she was perfectly happy

with Captain and Mrs. Burke, and of Mr. Owen she spoke with gratitude for his attention and sympathy.

I was told, however, by one or two sea-going acquaintances not to wonder if we did not hear again from Marie until the ship arrived at her first port, Valparaiso. A vessel might be ninety days upon the ocean and yet not 'speak' another. A friend spoke of an Indiaman that, in the whole voyage from Bombay to the Thames—not allowing, of course, for the ships seen on touching at Cape-town—had sighted nothing but the topmast canvas of a vessel whose hull was sunk out of sight below the horizon.

I was living in rooms out of Bond Street. One morning in 1860, it was October 2, and Marie had then been absent from England six months, during which, after the arrival of the Liverpool brig, we had received no news whatever either of her or the 'Lady Emma.' I say, on October 2, whilst at breakfast, I picked up a

morning newspaper and began to turn it about. After reading for some time my eye lighted upon a paragraph headed, ‘Loss of the ship “Lady Emma.”’ I trembled and felt sick ; I wanted courage to read the paragraph, though the paper was shuddering in my hands, and my eyes were upon the news, yet before reading I caught myself reasoning ; it is another ‘Lady Emma’ —it cannot be Marie’s ship—there may be ten or twenty ‘Lady Emmas’ afloat—and then I read.

The paragraph—I have not preserved it—was to this effect :

The barque ‘Planter,’ being to the eastwards of Cape Horn, fell in with a ship’s long-boat full of men. The captain took the unfortunate people on board, but some were found to be lifeless, having been frozen to death during the night. Their story was, they were the boatswain (Wall) and survivors of the ship ‘Lady Emma,’ Burke, master, that sailed from the Thames bound to Valpa-

raiso on April 2. She had been driven to the southward and eastward by heavy weather, and when she was in about fifty-nine degrees south latitude, she was totally dismasted by a sudden hurricane. After fruitless efforts to erect a jury-mast, the crew abandoned her in the long-boat. With them went the ship's doctor (Owen). The master refused to quit the ship, and remained aboard with his wife and a young lady passenger. Very shortly after the long-boat had been met with, one of the crew of the 'Planter' fell overboard. A boat was lowered in charge of the chief mate, Mr. Ralph Selby, but before she could reach the man a sea capsized her, and the mate and the three men who were in her were drowned. Within a week of picking up the survivors of the 'Lady Emma's' crew, the 'Planter' transferred them to a vessel bound to Monte Video, where they were forwarded by H.B.M. Consul by steamer to this country, arriving yesterday at the West India Docks. Mr.

Owen died before the arrival of the vessel at Monte Video, and was buried at sea. It is supposed that the ‘Lady Emma’ foundered prior to the rescue of her crew, as Captain Parry of the ‘Planter,’ which is a barque of four hundred and sixty tons, cruised at great risk amongst the ice in the neighbourhood of the spot where the hull was supposed to be lying without seeing anything of her.

I sat as one paralysed, read the account through again, scarcely even then believing that the ship was the same that my betrothed had sailed in. Next, thrusting the newspaper into my pocket, I jumped up, ran into the street, and, jumping into a cab, bade the man drive me to Messrs. Butcher and Hobbs, at such and such a number in the Minories. It was about a quarter to ten o’clock.

Butcher and Hobbs were the owners of the ‘Lady Emma’—of her and a little fleet of smaller vessels. I had been introduced by Captain Burke to Mr. Hobbs, and now it came

to me as I was driven fast, with my brain in a whirl, half mad with consternation, grief, the hundred emotions which must needs throng upon so abrupt a disclosure of dreadful news as this I had just read—it came to me, I say, that Mr. Hobbs in my presence had very earnestly advised Captain Burke to insure some goods he was taking out as a speculation of his own ; and I recollect the captain replying, with an arch, laughing air, full of strong confidence, that insurance would only render him indifferent : he had no fear as to the safety of the ship. If he insured and she was lost, it would be said he sank or stranded her.

On my arrival in the Minories I entered an old-fashioned, grimy office, in which sat a tall, stoutly-built seaman with immense whiskers, both hands on his knees ; he stared idly, as though waiting. I went to a desk, and asked for Mr. Butcher or Mr. Hobbs. The clerk may have recollect ed me ; he instantly rose,

entered an inner office, and returning, begged me to step in.

Mr. Hobbs was alone: a large fat man, yellow-haired and bearded, with staring, watery eyes. As I entered he stood up, with an air of deep dejection, and extending his hand, bowed over it, looking down, exclaiming :

‘I know the business that has brought you here, sir. It is terrible—it is shocking ! But——’ He then stood erect, and shrugged his shoulders, with a roll of his eyes upwards.

‘The report in the paper is true, then ? said I.

‘I grieve to say it is,’ he replied.

I so trembled with grief I could scarcely speak to the man.

‘Are we to entertain no hope whatever ?’ I said, leaning upon the table for support. He placed a chair ; I sank into it and proceeded : ‘Surely we need not certainly con-

clude the dismasted ship sunk after the long-boat left her merely because——’ and here, forgetting the names, I brought out the newspaper to refer to—‘ the “Planter” failed to find her after a few hours’ search in, perhaps, thick weather, and amongst the ice, which may have been numerous?’

‘ Oh, of course,’ he exclaimed, ‘ we must not abandon hope. As you justly put it, the “Planter’s” search counts for little, considering how brief it was, and the state of the weather. I’ll not pretend I have much hope myself, but the sea provides many chances. Again and again you hear of rates rising, till no further risk is taken; then the ship is posted, her end made sure of, and one fine morning she’s signalled off some Channel station, blowing leisurely along with the loss of her foretop-mast and her bottom beach-like with weed. I don’t despair, sir; yet I must honestly own my hope is not strong.’ He paused, then said, ‘ I believe one of the crew of the “Lady

Emma's" in the front office.' He walked to the door and looked out. 'Would you like to see him? He was the boatswain of the ship. His name is Wall.'

I eagerly begged him to bring him in. He called, and the big sailor I had noticed entered. I immediately recollect that Marie, in the fragment of journal she had sent us, had described and praised him for his civility and his qualities as a seaman. He stood before us, cap in hand, his back slightly arched by years of stooping and hauling and curling of his body over yards and booms; his weather-coloured face was hard as leather, and rugged and knotted with muscle; one of those seafaring faces, impenetrable to the chisel of ocean experience which fifty tragedies of the deep would no more mark than the human anguish in shipwreck alters the face of the rock which stares through the salt smoke down upon the scene.

'This gentleman,' said Mr. Hobbs, 'is Mr.

Archibald Moore. The young lady passenger aboard the “Lady Emma” was——’ he dropped his head and was silent.

I gazed at the seaman with consuming interest; he had been among the last—he might have been the last—who had seen, who had spoken to Marie.

‘ You’ll not tell me,’ said I, in a broken voice, ‘ there’s no hope for the three you left behind you?’

‘ No, sir, I’ll not tell you that,’ answered the man in deep tones, which trembled upon the ear with the power of their volume. ‘ I’ve said all along that if the ice only lets the hull keep afloat, there was nothen to prevent her being fallen in with. She wasn’t so far south,’ continued he, looking at Mr. Hobbs, ‘ as to be out of the way of half a dozen chances a week if the weather opened out the sea, and gave a view of her as she lay flat, with but twelve foot of foremast standing.’

‘ Why were they left behind?’ I cried.

‘Why were they left to wash about in a dismasted hulk amongst ice, to perish horribly after days of suffering perhaps?’ and I beat the table with my fist.

‘Mr. Moore, the capt’n refused to quit,’ said the seaman, speaking calmly in his deep voice, and viewing me with an air of respectful pity. ‘My mates ’ll tell you I entreated of him and the ladies to enter the boat, likewise did Mr. Owen, the doctor. We wasn’t listened to. The captain was all for waiting for something to come alongside, and take the hulk in tow. He was for jury-rigging her—on a twelve-foot stump of foremast!’ said he, slowly regarding Mr. Hobbs. ‘The consarn blew over the bows. What in that way was going to stand down there?’

‘You should have used force,’ I said.

‘With the capt’n?’ he exclaimed, with a slow, astonished shake of his head.

‘Had you got the captain into the boat, the ladies would have followed.’

‘Neither ‘ud have been alive next morning. The young one would have froze to death in a few hours. You should have heard the strongest amongst us groaning with the cold when we lost sight of the craft we were making for, and when the night drawed down, and we were for the hull, all hands of us mad for the shelter of her and the warmth of our blankets and the hot drinks to be got. I tell ye, sir,’ he added, calmly and respectfully, ‘that the captain knew more about it than we did, and was right to keep the ladies aboard ; for if they was to die, better comfortably in a warm cabin than in an open boat with spray sheeting over them at every plunge.’

‘What was the situation of the hull when the crew abandoned her ?’ I asked.

Mr. Hobbs pulled open a drawer, and read aloud a copy of an entry in the log-book of the ‘Planter’ in which the meeting with the long-boat was minuted. The situation as there

stated was Latitude 58° 45' S., Longitude 45° 10' W. This copy of the logbook entry had been handed by Captain Parry of the 'Planter' to the master of the ship to whom the crew had been transferred.

A yellow glazed map of the world hung in the office over the mantelpiece. My eye went to it, and I made a step, saying to the boatswain Wall :

'Show me to the place. What land lies nearest to it? What is the usual track of ships passing Cape Horn?'

He hung back, evidently ignorant of maps and of latitude and longitude. Mr. Hobbs, picking up a ruler, approached the mantelpiece, and, peering close at the dingy map, presently put the end of the ruler upon a part of it and said :

'This, as nearly as possible, will be the place where the crew abandoned the hull.'

'Is that land there?'

Mr. Hobbs slanted his head to read, and

exclaimed ; ‘ Ay ; in this little group we have —my sight is not what it was—ah ! the South Orkneys. These to the left—’ with straining sight and some difficulty he spelt out ‘ South Shetlands.’

‘ What sort of islands are they ? ’ I asked.

‘ About the most desolate, froze-up, uninhabited rocks on that side of the world,’ answered Wall. ‘ There’s nothen to be thought of along o’ them.’

‘ Why ? ’ I asked.

‘ Because going ashore there would be like hittin’ ice. In the swell that’s always a-running, the hull ’ud go to pieces with the first blow, like a loosed faggot. Their one chance,’ he added, in a voice of deep conviction, ‘ lies in their being fallen in with and taken off. That may have happened. If so, it’ll be a question of waiting.’

‘ If so,’ cried Mr. Hobbs, with a raised manner of cheerfulness that was scarcely sincere I thought, ‘ Captain Burke will bear in

mind the suspense and anxiety you and the young lady's father are suffering, and exert his experience as an old seaman to promptly communicate, so that, let us trust, if there be good news in store, we'll get it quickly.'

'Suppose the hull should have been thrown upon an iceberg,' I exclaimed, addressing Wall, 'must she inevitably go to pieces?'

'That 'ud depend upon how she took the ice,' he answered.

'If she stranded and lay dry—such things have happened—could the three live in her?'

'Yes, sights more comfortably than if she was afloat.'

'For how long?'

'She was freighted,' said Mr. Hobbs, 'with an abundance of the necessaries of life.'

'How long could a vessel remain on the ice in a habitable state?'

'Years,' answered Wall, 'if she's let alone. Give her a snug berth clear of the wash of the

sea and tumbling blocks, and what's to hurt her?’

Mr. Hobbs was staring at me earnestly. ‘I could wish to persuade you,’ he exclaimed, with a melancholy inclination of his head, ‘to discard the notion of the hull finding a berth in an iceberg. Our hope must take a practical form. Let us, then, believe that the wreck has been encountered by one of the many whalers and other vessels which frequent those seas, and that Captain Burke and his companions are at this present moment safe.’

I turned to Wall and plied him with questions. What was the condition of the hull? What had been the state of Miss Otway’s health? Did he believe, by recalling her looks when he last saw her, that she had the strength to outlive the horrors, trials, suspense, suffering, of even one week of a dismasted hull, rolling about amidst the ice in dangerous, desolate seas?—the wildest in the world and in their

mid-winter? Was Captain Burke, singlehanded, aboard the wreck, as a man, capable of doing anything to help them into safety? If not, why had he stuck to the ship? What madman's nightmare of imagination could have induced him to remain with two women aboard a vessel he could do nothing with?

I almost raved my questions at the man, so wild grew my heart with grief whilst I listened to his plain answers, full of an old practical seaman's good sense, though several times he repeated that the captain was right to keep his wife and Miss Otway aboard, as they never could have survived the first night in the long-boat.

He increased my distress by hinting somewhat doubtfully that Captain Burke had fallen a little weak in his mind during the voyage; he spoke of an apparition that had been seen to walk on the ship's forecastle; it had been clothed in the likeness of the captain, and ever after he had ceased to be quite the same man.

‘Can you imagine,’ I cried, rounding upon Mr. Hobbs, ‘that the loss of the ship is owing to Captain Burke having gone mad?’

‘You wouldn’t say so?’ he answered, looking at Wall.

‘No, sir,’ answered the seaman, ‘there was no madness in that job of dismasting, if it wasn’t in the weather.’

‘But,’ I exclaimed, picking up the ruler Mr. Hobbs had used, and laying the end of it upon the map, ‘what was the captain’s motive in carrying this vessel so far south? See where the Horn is? What, in God’s name, was he doing so high?’

‘He was blowed there,’ answered the man.

‘I understand,’ said Mr. Hobbs, ‘that a succession of hard northerly gales settled the vessel to the southward and eastward, considerably out of the usual course.’

‘The “Planter” was also blowed south,’ said Wall.

I continued to question with impassioned

anxiety, eagerness, and grief, till I found I was likely to become an intruder in the office, on which, asking the boatswain Wall for his address, and ascertaining that he did not mean to look about him for another berth at present, I shook hands with Mr. Hobbs, and walked to my place of business in the City—a private bank near Gracechurch Street.

Sir Mortimer Otway was at this time at Paris on a visit to some friends. I had heard from him two days before, and understood that he would return on the fourth or fifth. His health was not good. Of late he had become very anxious about his daughter. He thought it was time, after six months, that he should receive news of her, or that the ‘Lady Emma’ should be reported. This being so, I resolved not to write, but to wait until his return, when I would tell him of the wreck of the ship, if, indeed, the account of it did not reach him through other hands, or the newspapers in Paris.

For my own part I was so shocked, so stunned, there was something so terrible to my imagination in the character of this wreck, in every circumstance of it, having regard to the loneliness of the three, the wild and stormy breast of waters where the hull had been left plunging helpless by her crew, that I could not hold up my head. I could not speak. I sat in a sort of stupor. My father reasoned with me ; he pointed out that the hull was afloat, a stout, seaworthy vessel when the crew left her ; that being dismasted she was less likely to beat against the ice than were she moving through the water under sail ; that a vessel had been seen and pursued by the crew ; that where one was there must be others ; and so on, and so on.

I heard him and that was all.

I cannot tell how great was my love for Marie. I felt that I had acted as a wretch, betrayed the darling of my heart to her destruction, in sanctioning her father's scheme



